

"I was never a Trotskyist"

Pabloite France Unbowed leader speaks on Ukraine war and the class struggle

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24 May 2024

At the May Day demonstration in Marseille, WSWs reporters met Samuel Johsua. A long-time member of the Pabloite movement, Johsua left the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) to join the Left Front. Elected in 2014 in the 13th and 14th arrondissements of Marseille, he is now a member of Jean-Luc Mélenchon's France Unbowed (LFI) party.

Johsua joined the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF) at the age of 13, after the 1961 coup d'état during Algeria's war of independence from France. He was active in the Union of Communist Students (UEC), where he knew the Pabloite leader Alain Krivine, later joining the Pabloite Revolutionary Communist Youth, which became the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR). An emeritus professor of education, he is the author of *Schools between crisis and refoundation* (1999) and *Another School is Possible* (2003).

One cannot understand the interview with Johsua without recalling the fundamental split between the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and the Pabloite movement in 1953. The ICFI rallied those who still defended Trotsky's Marxist struggle against Stalinism and capitalism, and the perspective of a struggle of the international working class for power and socialism. The forces led by Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel argued that the working class could no longer play a revolutionary role, a role that fell to Stalinist and bourgeois nationalist bureaucracies.

The interview with Johsua reveals the chasm separating LFI from Marxism, and the obstacle Pabloism poses to a revolutionary struggle of the working class for socialism. The problem is not, as Johsua claims, that workers are not ready to fight. The parties that the capitalist media promote as the "far left" are petty-bourgeois parties linked to the union bureaucracies, and which support NATO and imperialism, even in the face of the genocide in Gaza and Macron's calls to send troops to Ukraine to fight a war with Russia.

Shrugging off the union bureaucracies' betrayals of class struggles, and in particular last year's struggle against Macron's pension cuts in France, Johsua advances an utterly demoralized perspective. Ignoring the role of bureaucracies and parties that strangle the workers, it blames the working class for the absence of revolutionary struggle. While Mélenchon received 8 million votes in the 2022 presidential elections, Johsua claims that Mélenchon could do nothing to mobilize his voters, either. In short, nothing whatsoever can be done.

The question of the international unification of the working class is, according to Johsua, a question to be raised ritually, once a year, on May Day. This anti-Marxist, nationalist perspective is extremely dangerous: the international unification of the working class in struggle is the only way to stop imperialist war, genocide, police-state rule and social austerity.

As a new generation of youth mobilizes internationally against the Gaza genocide, it is essential to build an international revolutionary and socialist movement, based on the lessons of the great struggles of the 20th

and 21st centuries. The political and historical foundation of such a movement is the ICFI's defense of Trotskyism against its falsification by Pabloism and other petty-bourgeois tendencies linked to Stalinism.

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WSWS: Why are you demonstrating on May Day?

Johsua: May 1st is a tradition that has been paid for dearly. It took a few riots to get the right to march on May Day, and so once a year it is explained that there is an international unity of workers that must be shown.

It is also an opportunity to highlight the problems of the moment: the rise of the far right all over the world and also, unfortunately, in our country. This rise, if we think about it a little, is linked to offensives against the destruction of workers' gains. Many people voted for Macron to block Le Pen in the last presidential elections. Instead of being a wall against fascism, he proved to be a causeway towards it.

There is the return of war in Europe with Russia and then what is happening in Gaza with this permanent massacre carried out by Israel, despite criticisms by other governments. The term genocide is discussed, the UN tribunal says that there is a risk, this risk should not be taken. Just yesterday Netanyahu said he was going to invade Rafah so everyone knows that means a humanitarian disaster. We must obtain a ceasefire and a lasting political solution and even the release of the hostages.

WSWS: Why is there not a call from Mélenchon to mobilize the workers, and the 8 million voters who voted for him in the 2022 presidential elections, against the war and genocide in Gaza? LFI is also targeted with threats of prosecution over its statements on Gaza.

Johsua: I don't think the problem is a call for mobilization. Many sectors have been called upon to be mobilized by Mélenchon, but we can see that internationalism in general has a lot of difficulty expressing itself in France, especially the demonstrations for Gaza, which are less important in France than abroad. There must be much more fundamental reasons, the general balance of power between the left and the right has deteriorated considerably. In the polls, the left is 50 percent, but the left is not pro-Palestinian.

I am disappointed at the beginning given the power of the media, after a month, we saw the massacres, I told myself that opinion would change. It has indeed shifted, the people who support Israel are a minority, and so are the Palestinians. They have switched to "we don't say anymore, we put ourselves aside."

At France Unbowed, we have not abandoned this, we have this in mind. We have seen inconceivable things. [LFI official] Rima [Hassan] and the president of the parliamentary group are summoned by the police for glorifying terrorism. That should scandalize everyone. I think that there is rather a lack of self-confidence on the part of people to change things. That an extraordinary movement put millions of people in the streets

against pensions, but we lost. The idea that you can influence something is problematic.

WSWS: During the pension reform against Macron, two out of three French people were in favour of a general strike, and people demonstrated en masse. Why do you think the fight was lost?

Joshua: Did those who had control of the movement do the right thing? That's debatable. I think we had the polls with us, people were convinced, but we didn't succeed because this government is sitting on institutions and the forces of repression. A general strike should have been called, but the call is not enough. It has to be triggered.

In 1968, there was no general strike at the beginning. People told themselves, let's go. When you see what has worked in Europe, it is the movements that occupy the squares, in Spain, in Athens, there were the *indignados*. I told myself that this is what we should do, but as my friend Olivier Besancenot told me: "We can't, because we would never have been allowed to occupy a place. The level of repression by the French government would be significant, and anything that goes beyond the unions has not been seen in France for a very long time."

WSWS: At the height of the protests, the unions decided to negotiate with [Prime Minister Elisabeth] Borne.

Joshua: That's debatable ... There was a call to block the country, but we didn't succeed. On the unions' negotiations with Borne, they said yes, but they didn't go. The workers didn't push hard enough. There is a crisis of militant commitment, except among youth. When the intellectual elites, as in the United States or at Science Po Paris, support Gaza, it indicates how youth orient themselves, as they do on the ecological question.

WSWS: What is LFI's position on the war in Ukraine?

Joshua: We condemn Russian aggression, and we are in favor of giving Ukrainians the means to defend themselves. At the European level, LFI voted to arm Ukraine. Then there is the question of NATO, we can see that all this strengthens NATO with the entry of Sweden in particular. At LFI we are for the dissolution of NATO.

Where it gets tricky is: what should we do now? The idea put forward is to find a way out of negotiations, so the populations can achieve self-determination and that this can be done within the framework of the OSCE, which has the advantage of not being NATO. We have to find solutions like the Minsk agreement, which was not respected. We are against Ukraine's accession to the EU under these conditions.

WSWS: What is your position on the role of NATO and fascistic forces in Ukraine, about the opposition of the Ukrainian population to the Ukrainian regime?

Joshua: We had the same question when Mussolini invaded Abyssinia, there was a fascist regime and a hyper-reactionary regime—what should we do? Trotsky said that we must defend the right of peoples to self-determination, and therefore to defend Abyssinia. When the question arose again in 1940 during World War II, Trotsky fought for the United States, the leading military power of the time, to enter the war, in opposition to the majority of Trotskyists in the American section who did not want integration into an inter-imperialist war. We are not fighting for Zelensky, we are defending a country under attack.

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WSWS reporters disputed this false identification of the Russian regime's war in Ukraine with the Italian fascist regime's invasion of Abyssinia (the Ethiopian monarchy) in 1935. One cannot determine a Marxist attitude toward a war by simply asking "who fired the first shot." The situation of Ukraine allied to NATO and invaded by Russian troops is not similar to that of a colonial country invaded by an imperialist power.

This false equation leaves out the decisive role of the NATO imperialist powers, which dominate international finance and economy. Workers must oppose Russia's reactionary capitalist regime and its war, but they must above all oppose the plans of Macron and other NATO leaders to control and plunder both Russia and Ukraine.

They also reject the historicization of the lying claim that Trotsky supposedly approved of US imperialism's role in World War II. Trotsky fought for the US and international working class to lead the struggle against Hitlerism while preserving its class independence. The Proletarian Military Policy proposed by Trotsky called for military training and military schools for workers and workers' officers, led in the United States by workers organizations, the unions newly built in the great class struggles of the 1930s in the United States.

WSWS reporters pointed out that this separated Trotsky from the pacifism of petty-bourgeois renegades from Trotskyism like Max Shachtman, who, after the Nazi conquest of France proposed a pacifist position, and eventually rallied to the war effort of US imperialism. Shachtman denounced both Trotsky and the Soviet Union, which he called "Russian imperialism." This same argument is now taken up, three-quarters of a century later, by the petty-bourgeois forces in Europe who back all-out war on Russia.

Joshua responded by supporting Shachtmanite attacks on Trotsky and the Trotskyist analysis of the Soviet Union, repeating his falsifications of the history of Trotskyism, and admitting that he had never been a Trotskyist.

He replied, "We don't refer to the same traditions. There was a divergence, yes, on the question of the nature of the USSR. Trotsky was wrong, but that's not what I want to debate today. On this question, I was never a Trotskyist, the counterrevolution did not maintain the foundation of the revolution. Trotsky wanted the United States to enter the war to prevent Hitler from winning, not just the arming of the American proletariat."

This pro-imperialist falsification of the history of Trotskyism underlies the adaptation of affluent middle-class elements that lead LFI to support imperialist war. As Joshua admits, the rejection of Trotsky's analysis of the Soviet Union and the false identification of the Soviet Union with the crimes of fascism, which dominated bourgeois and social-democratic Cold War propaganda, was highly influential in the post-1968 middle-class student movement. It was in this milieu that the Pabloite tendency developed a social base in France and across Europe.

Today, the historical prejudices of this well-to-do and complacent petty-bourgeois milieu prepare it to play a reactionary role. The main danger today, underscored by the genocide in Gaza as well as Macron's call to send troops to Ukraine, is that the US and its allies will massively escalate the war. This paves the way for the NATO-Russia military confrontation to escalate all the way to nuclear war.

LFI officials, establishing a simplistic amalgam between Putin and fascism in the 20th century, justify a capitulation to imperialism and war. Their indifference to the ties of imperialism to Ukrainian neo-fascism, and to the strangling of class struggles by the union bureaucracies, exposes the political chasm separating the academics and petty-bourgeois union bureaucrats at LFI from workers and youth.

The mobilization of workers and a new generation of youth radicalized by genocide, war and repression requires a political struggle against this corrupt milieu, based on the defense of the revolutionary traditions of Marxism and Trotskyism. This is the perspective advanced by the *Parti de l'égalité socialiste*, the French section of the ICFL.



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