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France

Why a French “No” vote will be a victory for the Left

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This is the text of Olivier Besancenot's speech at the meeting for a "No" to the referendum on the European Constitutional Treaty, which was organised by the French Communist Party at the Zenith meeting place in Paris on 14th April 2005, and which was attended by more than 6000 people.

Dear comrades, I would like to say to you, not just in the name of my party, but also in my own name, how touched and enthusiastic I am to be here. That is why I want to thank the Communist Party and its militants for this invitation, and I must say that for me it's a first. I am touched, because for quite a while we've been saying that it really had to happen, that one day we would find ourselves together.

For years, we've been meeting each other in the course of different militant struggles. So we had to at some point come together for a united political battle. And this anti-capitalist combat against the Constitution, that was the moment not to be missed. Because what is at stake in this referendum is really crucial and decisive: it really is about knowing what kind of society we are building.

[https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/Olivier_1.jpg]

We know that from a democratic and social, but also from a militarist point of view, this Constitution doesn't represent a rampart against present-day globalisation. On the contrary, it is one of the best supporters of the World Company.

So the Europe that they are building is not in any way a counterweight or an alternative model to the United States. This Europe is a rival, a competitor of the United States, but on its own terrain, the terrain of capitalism. A Europe that is more royalist than the king, that seeks to contest the leadership of the United States, but within the framework of globalisation.

So what is at stake is crucial, but we have two good reasons to be enthusiastic. Two good reasons, because not only can the “No” win today, but on top of that, if it does win it will be because of the Left, and it is in the camp of the Left that that things can shift. And all that is thanks to this militant united front campaign that we have been conducting from the beginning with the Communist Party, the LCR, the opponents (of the majority line) in the Greens and in the SP, but also and especially all the activists of the social movement.

We know that from the beginning the “No” from the right rallied all its votes: it's the electorate of the far Right, in the Le Pen or de Villiers version. We can leave those people where they are, which is in the Middle Ages. On the other hand, if things can shift on the left, it is because the social climate has changed. Since January, there have been many social mobilisations, one after the other, on public services, wages, against sackings and of course the high school student movement.

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/Wurtz5.jpg>]

Zenith platform: Besancenot (far left), Fausto Bertinotti (far right). CP general secretary Marie George Buffet is third from right.

All these struggles have had an immediate reflection: the progress in the country of a “No” that is not racist, nor chauvinist, nor anti-Turkish, but a “No” that is social, European and anti-liberal. And that is why this evening we can say, loud and clear, that there is really no reason to be afraid of the victory of the “No”. The victory of the “No” would be the hope of a new beginning, which would have repercussions from a social and political point of view.

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From a social point of view, first of all, in France and in Europe. There would be the possibility for the social movements to take off again on the right foot, to establish a new relationship of forces against the national governments, but also against the present European institutions. There would be the possibility of blazing a trail for the building of another Europe, by establishing new criteria of convergence, not financial and economic this time, but social and democratic.

We want to take what is best in the legislation of one country so that everyone can take advantage of it, because there is no reason why all we should share is poverty. Our project is the opposite, point for point, of what Bolkestein is proposing. Bolkestein, who had his electricity cut off by the workers of EDF, and a very good thing too. I hope that the postal workers will soon deal with his letterbox. Social repercussions also in France, even from now till May 29th.

Because the government has fully understood that the more struggles there are, the more the “No” goes up in the opinion polls. That's our strength. For example, there is something that is on the rise at present: the will not to obey the government's directive for Whit Monday. There are many of us in this country who don't want to work that day. And maybe, finally, Whit Monday will really be transformed into a day of solidarity between generations.

The only one worth talking about, a national one-day strike of the public and private sectors to underline our demands. Lastly, political repercussions, in terms of a new start. Because in this referendum it's on the left as well that we have to set things to rights. We have the possibility of choosing another political orientation on the left, for a Left that is 100 per cent left.

That means a Left which doesn't cave in to fashionable ideas, which doesn't subscribe to the idea that capitalism is the horizon beyond which we cannot go and that therefore all we can do is make a few changes around the edges. Yes, the hope of an anti-capitalist Left, capable of fighting to the end to increase everybody's income by 300 euros by sharing out wealth equitably.

A Left that would oppose privatisations, but would also fight to extend public services to areas like water. A Left that would fight to ban collective sackings, in particular in companies that are making profits. And finally a Left that would sometimes fight just to apply the law, for example the law that allows requisition of empty houses.

This hope is growing. This hope is thick-skinned. And the hammer blows from the government won't calm it down. Neither the hammer blows, nor the confidence tricks. Because at this very moment Jacques Chirac is supposed to be convincing young people, in front of an audience that is supposed to be super-representative but is in fact handpicked [\[1\]](#).

Well, let me tell you, it's here, tonight, that we have the representative audience. I hope that this evening on TF1, there will be at least one young person to suggest to Chirac that if the “No” is victorious on the evening of May 29th, then on the morning of the 30th he'll have to go and take his acolyte Raffarin with him.

So our hope doesn't fear the attacks of the Right. But nor is it afraid of the ambitions of the social-liberal Left. It's time for the social-liberal Left to understand that it is no longer hegemonic over the whole of the Left. For it to understand that you don't settle fundamental political problems with scandalous amalgams between, for example, our anti-capitalist “No” to the Constitution and the “No” of the far Right.

It's time for the social-liberal Left to understand that it won't get us to do tomorrow in the state institutions, the opposite of what we are defending today in the public arena, in the context of this common anti-capitalist combat. In short, it's time for it to understand that this united front anti-capitalist combat isn't going to disappear tomorrow in a liberal government that will in practice apply the Constitution, or even a “light”, slightly amended version of it if the

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“No” is victorious.

Well, to put a stop to discussion, some people reproach us with having a parasitical attitude to this referendum. When we affirm that another choice of society is possible, they call us romantics. I didn't know that was an insult. And to tell you the truth, I am proud of being among those who, including in this campaign, don't forget to say that another society than capitalism is still possible.

[1] The same evening as the meeting, Jacques Chirac was conducting a stage-managed “debate” with 80 young people on France's main TV channel, TF1.