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France

# A new force

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**The national congress of the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR, French section of the Fourth International) took place at the beginning of November 2003. Coverage of the congress figured largely in the press and television, even making the front page of the "left" daily Liberation.**

*This media interest was partly a product of the unexpectedly successful presidential campaign in 2002 led by Olivier Besancenot, the young postman who was the LCR candidate; but it was also provoked by the decision of the congress to approve an electoral agreement with France's other main far left organization, Lutte Ouvrière, for the regional elections in March and the European elections in June 2004.*

[[https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/18\\_lcrdemo.jpg](https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/18_lcrdemo.jpg)]

*The far left in France has registered some important electoral scores - the previous LO-LCR agreement in 1999 saw five Euro-MPs elected. Some Socialist Party leaders blamed the far left for the defeat of Lionel Jospin in last year's presidential election and for the presence of Jean-Marie Le Pen in the second round.*

*This article by François Sabado, one of the longstanding leaders of the LCR, summarizes the opinion of the congress majority on the decision to conclude this electoral agreement, which went alongside the decision to continue and reinforce the initiatives and the call of the LCR for the constitution of a broad new anti-capitalist political force.*

## 1 LCR LO Agreement

For the first time in the history of the organization, a congress of the LCR was a political event marking the national political situation. This is the result of combined decisions - the search for an electoral agreement between LO and the LCR, the announcement of initiatives for a new anti-capitalist political force and the capacity of the LCR to update its revolutionary Marxism. [1]

The choice by a broad majority of the organization to make an electoral agreement with LO testifies to the maturity of the LCR, deciding to use all means available to have an impact on the political situation. The current role of the radical left and the revolutionary left is a result of underlying trends. First of all, the political crisis in the country; more than 20 years of neoliberal policies, implemented by successive right wing and neoliberal left governments, have caused a total crisis of political representation. This crisis exploded on April 21, 2002 with the presence of Le Pen in the second round of the presidential election.

This partly hid another major political fact; three million voted for left-wing revolutionary candidates. This rise of the far left is a trend. It was already noted in 1995, with the results of Arlette Laguiller in the presidential election. It was confirmed in the 1998 regional and 1999 European elections and the 2001 local elections. It can, following a trauma like April 21, grow blurred, as it did in the parliamentary elections in 2002. But there is definitely a new space for the radical left, not only in France, but also in a series of European countries. It results from three factors: first, the social-liberal evolution of traditional social democracy; second, the accelerated decline of the Communist Parties; lastly, and most decisively for us, social resistance to neoliberalism. In spite of the defeats suffered at the level of work organization (flexibility, casualization, deregulation) or pensions, the ruling classes have not broken the potential for fightback from workers and youth. The social conflicts of winter 1995 and spring 2003 in France, as well as the emergence of new generations through the global justice movement, testify to this resistance. It is these new

elements on the left that the leaders of the former governmental left parties do not accept. This explains the outburst by SP leaders against the LO-LCR agreement for the regional and European elections. According to them, we are serving the interests of the right by not calling for a vote for them in the second round of the regional elections. But what they reproach us for, above all, is our very existence with this new social, political and electoral strength. Oh, the LCR was “so nice” as long as it did not get more than 2%! When things get serious, then the SP leaders do not like playing the democratic game. But the LCR does not mistake its enemy. For us, the enemy is the bosses, the right and the far right. And in a situation where, after having sickened millions of workers and young people who were put off from political combat, the neoliberal policy of the leaders of the former governmental left bears full responsibility for the return of the right, the anti-capitalist left is today the most effective instrument against the right and extreme right. For the second round, we will reaffirm the same policy as at the time of the 2002 presidential and legislative elections; we will not call for a vote. Some of our voters will vote for the left. Some will abstain. We understand both attitudes. If the left candidates want the votes that went to the far left, they have to convince the voters! We will call for a vote for the left only if there is the risk of a National Front victory. Our goal in these elections is to reject the idea that the political and electoral field belongs to the right, the neoliberal left and the far right, and to make the revolutionary and anti-capitalist left the fourth political force in the country.

## 2 The new force

For ten years, the League has noted the end of a whole historical cycle of the movement, and the need to hold a discussion on “the new period, the new programme, the new party”. After a series of experiments and tests, political developments make it possible to take stock and to continue this discussion. This is of course illuminated by our assessment of the Besancenot campaign but takes into account many other elements.

Our origin and history were marked by left opposition to Stalinism. Since the 1930s, the question of Stalinism internationally and the PCF in France have constituted major questions for our intervention in the class struggle and party building. Leaving aside the question of different tactics (fraction work in the CP, independent group or party, open or “sui generis” [2] entryism, revolutionary youth organization), our perspectives were shaped by the opposition to Stalinism. This is not the case today. First of all, because Stalinism is in its death agony. But, more generally, we are no longer an opposition. There has been a historic change in the overall configuration of the labour movement. We have direct responsibilities not only in the reorganization of the labour movement and the building of a new political force but also in the rebuilding of a class-based social movement.

Stalinism is clinically dead, but this process coincides with qualitative changes in globalized capitalism that sap the material bases of traditional reformism and provoke a fundamental transformation of social democracy. What we call the “social liberalization” of the socialist parties changes their social base, structure and type of leadership. French social democracy was never a mass party like German or English social democracy. Moreover, neoliberalism and Bonapartism choked the party of Epinay. [3] The equation “struggles, joining trade-unions, growth of reformist parties, vote for the left, left government” does not function any more. The rupture between the left parties and social movements is deep-going. There is a structural break with the popular classes. The social-liberal transformation of a reformism now “without reform” is an irreversible trend, even if the process is not completed. In fact, there is enormous pressure on the whole labour movement. The leadership of the Brazilian Workers Party, which for years had asserted the class struggle and the fight against neoliberalism, is today implementing a neoliberal policy required by the financial markets and the IMF. Another example is the turn of Fausto Bertinotti and the leadership of Rifondazione Comunista in Italy, which is preparing to discuss the perspective of a coalition with the centre-left i.e. with the forces of the Olive Tree and Romano Prodi, president of the very neoliberal European Commission.

That does not prejudice the pace, the resistances or the reactions that might emerge within the CP or the SP. But the distinct and joint crises of Stalinism and social democracy reorganize the shape of the labour movement. Particularly

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as, during the last ten years, the oppositions within the CP and social democracy have not developed significantly. In the SP they have not left the social-liberal framework fixed by the general evolution of the SP. As for the oppositions within the CP, they oscillate between becoming satellites of social-liberalism and nostalgic Stalinism. In these conditions, it is a question more of rebuilding or of reorganizing a new labour movement and of building a new political force of the workers than shifting the dividing lines in the traditional left.

The question of a new political force is historically and politically posed. But the situation is contradictory. The spring 2003 strike movement confirmed the aspiration of thousands of activists to a new political force. This arises from the end of Stalinism and the neoliberal transformation of social democracy. It falls in a political context, which is marked by social resistance to neoliberalism. There has been a turn since the mid-, and especially the end of the, 1990s. Globalized capitalism has not stabilized in a new cycle of expansion. The multiple crises, tensions and contradictions dominate. For ten years, wars, like the latest adventure in Iraq, have been the concentrated form of these tensions. The crisis in Latin America, with the Brazilian turn, is an example of this instability. European dysfunctions testify to internal ruling-class contradictions.

But the overall relationship of forces remains unfavourable to the labour movement. The neoliberal offensive continues. On the other side, the labour movement, the social movements, the anti-globalization organizations resist. But the effects of the crisis of the revolutionary socialist project on the consciousness of broad sectors persist. There is not yet a social and political crisis of the breadth or historical import, which would provide some first brief replies to the problem of a political solution. The Argentinean situation is a tragic example of this shift between an acute crisis of the capitalist relations and weakness of the political solution. The situation in Brazil is going, from this point of view, to constitute a decisive test.

This gives revolutionary Marxists an even greater responsibility to advance along the path to a new anti-capitalist force. That requires clarifying the forms and content. This new anti-capitalist political force, this new party fighting for socialism, will be the fruit of a social and political reorganization of the labour movement, linked to struggles. It will be able to offer to the social movements the political partner they are lacking. It will not be born from the forces of revolutionaries alone, nor by simple propaganda. This new force will constitute a qualitative leap in the consciousness and organization of broad sectors of the radical, social and political left. It will have to upset the internal relations of forces on the left, by pushing back social-liberalism. The conditions under which these relations evolve will obviously determine, to a large measure, the fight for a new force. But the most probable is that, while causing upheavals in the whole of the social and political field, and while making the essential synthesis between the balance sheet of the past that a section of the old labour movement would make and the essential contribution of the rising generation, its centre of gravity will be outside the traditional organizations of the labour movement. Its potential lies in the struggles of youth and the social movements, like the global justice movement.

The ideas that we defend are those of a break with the capitalist system. The new party that we want cannot result from a reforming of the traditional left which would not clarify the fundamental questions of the fight against liberalism and for socialism. The ideas of rupture with the capitalist and neoliberal order cannot find their place in strategies whose goal is limited to getting into government and "to "equilibrating" the alliance with a SP converted to social-liberalism. This is why, an "anti-neoliberal front" with the Greens, whose model remains the German "green red" coalition, or with a CP in favour of opening up the capital of certain public companies, would be meaningless. It would add confusion to confusion. Our perspective is that of a force related to the class struggle, which refuses to manage the capitalist economy and institutions. A force which stands for the overthrow of capitalism by a general mobilization of the popular classes, their self-organization and self-government, a workers' government.

This is a long-term battle for which it is difficult to predict the pace. Elections can speed up the process. The relations between the LCR and LO constitute one of the elements of this process even if, on this question, the positions of LO are an obstacle to moving forward.

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We should not reduce our battle for a new force to LO-LCR relations but start from objective needs and concrete possibilities. This is the direction of the Appeal by the congress: a goal is fixed; we will take initiatives on all levels, from local to national, organized in an open way and with a strong political content. And we will assess the dynamics. In this process, the LCR and its members must reinforce their dialogue with anti-capitalist activists and currents. They will create forums for action and debates. If this dynamic goes well beyond the LCR and, in the terms of the political theses voted by the 15th congress, “constitutes a qualitative leap in the consciousness and organization of broad sectors of the social and political left”, the question of a new party is on the agenda. In any case, through this same process, we will continue the transformation of the LCR into an open, democratic, political party, rooted in the popular classes.

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[1] The LCR congress also adopted new statutes. This aspect of the debate is not dealt with here.

[2] “Sui generis”, of its own type. This term is used for the long-term clandestine entryism in Communist or social-democratic parties practised in the 1950s-60s.

[3] The French Socialist Party was (re)founded by François Mitterrand among others at the congress in Epinay in 1971.