

# The anticapitalist party project of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire

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Martin Suchanek interviews Marc Lassalle and Ines Fertin from France on the new project of the LCR.

**Some months ago, the LCR and Olivier Besancenot called for the building of a new anti-capitalist party. What kind of response has there been to this call from workers, youth and the social movements?**

Marc: Olivier Besancenot first called for an anticapitalist party in an interview just after last year's presidential election. Then in July the LCR leadership launched a more formal appeal. On the ground the reaction from the LCR members has been uneven and in some cases very slow. The first open meetings for the new party took place only in the last few months. The LCR claims that 3000 people in 350 local committees are now actively building the new party. This represents just one half of France's departments and these numbers are continuing to rise. However, it is still difficult to say whether this appeal has a very large resonance beyond LCR sympathizers. What can be said is that Olivier Besancenot is very popular among youth and workers because he is seen as the most serious opponent of Sarkozy on the left. And the new party may fill a large vacuum left by the rightwing evolution of the Socialist Party and the Communist Party (PS and PCF).

Ines: However the aim of the LCR is precisely to get people fighting in the associations, against discrimination, against fascism or working in social associations in general, and young people from the very dynamic new generation in the lycées and the universities.

**Martin: How has the French left reacted to this initiative?**

Marc: The reformist left clearly fears that LCR may grow rapidly in the next period. The PS is taking the LCR quite seriously. Others have tried to copy the appeal for a new party. This is the case of the Lambertists, who now calls themselves Committees for a new Workers Party, by the PCF, which has considered changing its name and dissolving itself into a new party. And now again a list of intellectuals and public figures around Politis, a left political review, have launched an appeal for an alternative left. It is an attempt by many of these groups to claim some right to enter if LCR really succeeds launching a new party. This shows that this initiative corresponds to the reality of the class struggle today but of course the PCF is too compromised by its involvement in the last years of reformist governments to be credible as a launching force for this party and, indeed, all these forces are playing the role of parasites.

Ines: The other important left-wing party in France, Lutte Ouvrière, has totally rejected participating in the LCR's process of building a new party, indeed any process of anything new, except changing its own political strategy to one of allying itself with the PS in elections.

Marc: The opposition inside Lutte Ouvri're, the faction that has been suspended because it is opposed to

LO's turn toward alliances with the PS, has declared itself interested in the new party. However, together with other small groups, they think that this party is a new version of "revolutionary regroupment. This means, on the one hand, that they do not understand the potential to organize wider layers of workers into such a party. On the other these groups overestimate the importance of the unity of orthodox or "principled" Trotskyists, which for them represents the only way forward to building a revolutionary party and an International.

**Martin: During the autumn of 2007, the Sarkozy government was able to push through its attacks on workers and students despite some major battles. What plans does the French government now have for further attacks? What will be the tasks of a new party in building a front to resist them?**

Marc: Sarkozy is in the middle of another round of attacks against the pensions (41 years of work before retiring with a full pension), the 35 hour week, jobs cuts in the public sector and other measures against the schools and universities. However he has to do this at a point where he is quite unpopular, precisely because most of the workers and youth now fully realise what his plans are. For instance, he promised to be the president of the pouvoir d'achat (purchasing power) but his first measure was to reduce taxes for the rich. Living conditions are more and more difficult for the working class because salaries have been virtually frozen for several years whilst prices are shooting up. So Sarkozy's lies are now fully exposed. And now even the trade union leaders, who were eager to discuss and negotiate with him a few months ago, are threatening to take to the streets. Several days of actions are planned in June by the railway workers and against the attack on pensions.

Ines: Sarkozy also plans to reduce the right of strike by imposing a 'minimum service' in all the public sector, that is forcing some percentage of the workers of a workplace (schools, rail and all other means of transport) to work when a strike is taking place, while the government wants to cut 13,000 jobs for salaried staff. At present it is demolishing the research system by simply dismantling the CNRS, the public sector organisation that funds this. There are also going to be new quotas for raids on the sans papiers, immigrants who don't have full documentation. The Paris prefect of police announced last week that he wants 64 arrests and deportations per week in the city.

**What kind of party does the LCR have in mind?**

Marc: The LCR would like to build a party around a minimal basis. It should be anticapitalist, refuse any coalition with PS and it should be the expression of the struggles. Most probably the platform would be similar to the LCR's programme d'urgence (emergency programme) for the last elections. As you can see, anything from a left reformist party to a fully revolutionary party would satisfy these conditions. So the LCR remains very ambiguous on the most decisive issues and tries to have catch-all formulation. Instead of saying that they are for a revolution they stand for a party that 'revolutionises society'. Instead of expropriation of capitalists they speak of 'partage des richesses' (wealth sharing). So instead of organising a clear debate on reform or revolution, LCR would like opportunistically to take everybody in, in other word to build a mass centrist party.

**Martin: What do you think about this strategy, what kind of party do you want to see?**

Marc: We have welcomed the LCR appeal for a new party. Indeed the LCR has a responsibility to take up the political sympathy that it was able to create around its leader Olivier Besancenot, since he is considered as spokesperson not just of LCR but of the recent struggles and movements of the workers and the youth in general. The LCR has a political responsibility to organize the vanguard of the 1.5 million votes it obtained at the last presidential elections. In 1995, LO had also got a similar score and called for a new party, held a number of successful public meetings on the subject and then decided, in a quite

cowardly way, to close that discussion down. The LCR has shown more courage (maybe as well as a cleverer opportunism). What was very clearly lacking in the latest struggles was a political force giving a clear political lead to the masses in their mobilisations. The trade union bureaucrats were able to slow down the latest struggle, derail it and in the end sell it out, because there was no organised political force challenging their misleadership. Also to mount a strong resistance against Sarkozy means to unite all the sectors under attack in order to build a fighting solidarity (the youth, the sans papiers, workers in the public and private sector). This is the role that this new party could play and for this reason we welcomed the launching of it and are intervening in it today. This intervention has three main axes:

Firstly, the new party should be based on an action program, capable of mobilising against Sarkozy and the employers' attacks but also proposing to workers the political instruments to organize the struggles by themselves. This action program should be a transitional program, from the defensive demands being raised today to a generalized offensive against the capitalism and the bourgeois state that protects it. Secondly, the new party should openly challenge the rule of reformist bureaucracy in the trade unions and their 'monopoly' of workers struggles. An important step in this direction would be to build a rank and file movement against the bureaucracy aiming to transform the unions.

Finally, the new party should organise a democratic debate on reform versus revolution. Of course we would fight for it to become a democratic centralist, internationalist, revolutionary communist party based on a revolutionary program.

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