

# **Euro-election shock by Balazs Nagy**

*The surprise results of the recent European elections mean all political organisations have to re-evaluate the overall situation and their own policies.*

## **Complete bankruptcy of bourgeois Europe**

Two highly revealing and significant facts stand out about these elections, as a whole and in each individual country. First, and certainly foremost, is the particularly high level of abstentions (approaching 60% in France!), concentrated, moreover, in conurbations where workers and working people live. Abstentions were clearly higher, it needs to be said, in the countries of Eastern Europe (more than 70% in the great majority of them, over 80% in Slovakia and the Czech Republic). This clearly reflects their secondary position within European "unity".

The second is the unprecedented and ubiquitous growth of fascist or semi-fascist oppositions, a far right which actually came first in certain countries (France, UK, Denmark).

Apart from anything else, the first and most obvious conclusion is that the vast majority of Europeans are turning their backs on and definitively rejecting that monstrous construct called "European union". This central conclusion cannot be queried or challenged just by reference to the obviously broad range of views among those who abstained, or even voted for the far-right. Of course each of their various – and sadly all too often reactionary, retrograde or simply backward – motives is crucially significant in its own way. We should note, however, that many of those who voted

for the far-right probably did so in protest against that Europe, rather than out of support for fascist ideology. Be that as it may, these results express an irrevocable verdict on the part of Europeans as a whole: They are absolutely opposed to the bourgeoisie's pseudo-Europe, which they massively reject and will not tolerate.

### **Bourgeois leaders' vicious and criminal intransigence**

Late on 25 May, French TV channels ran the election results and what the various political party representatives had to say about them. The evening's viewing provided a good opportunity to assess the immediate reactions of a whole range of the country's political parties, from the conservative or social-democratic official spokespeople for the Euro-homunculus right through to the opposition, by way of the leaders of Front de Gauche (Left Front) and Front National (National Front) and everything in between. What they said made it blindingly obvious that literally not a single one of the representatives of this bankers' Europe has understood what voters are trying to tell them, clear as that message has been. Not a single one of the social democratic leaders or their traditional bourgeois partner/opponents, nor the various subordinate currents which gravitate around them, had grasped what this means. That, of course, only surprised those incorrigibly naïve people who still take them seriously.

The main leader of the reactionary brain-dead in the Union pour un mouvement populaire (UMP) is [Jean-François Copé](#). All they could offer was the consolation that they had gained ground at the expense of Hollande's Parti socialiste (PS). Their noisy self-satisfaction, however, was tempered by regret at being overtaken by the National Front. They sadly resigned themselves to the fact that the rusty European hulk had just gone under, but had little to offer when it came to explaining why. Not that they even tried. Copé simply blamed Hollande's policies for this setback, obviously without realising that they are both in the same rather fragile European boat. Under

these conditions, how could they have seen that the reason their European cockleshell foundered was design and construction defects rather than something the captain had done wrong (Even if the latter's incompetence did accentuate the more basic flaws). As a result, they were all equally baffled by the huge advances the far right made right across the continent, and just saw it as a minor passing accident.

Alain Juppé speaks for another wing of the same party, allegedly more thoughtful and moderate, but even he could not rise above the same cheap parliamentarism. Being a more serious politician than his less sophisticated colleague Copé, he at least made the effort to sketch a political line to beat the National Front. Quickly adding the 10% of votes won by the bourgeois centre parties to the 20-21 % the UMP got, he triumphantly declared that the resulting 30% of votes cast easily beat the National Front's 25%. All you needed to do was combine the UMP and centre parties' votes, and a thorny political problem tuned into a simple parliamentary manoeuvre.

These recently-merged centre parties came in fourth place just in front of the ecologists, followed in 6<sup>th</sup> place by the Left Front. So they showed loud and overflowing satisfaction and were at pains to emphasise, in their enthusiastic congratulations, that their totally but critically pro-European policy is the way out of the current deadlock.

In fact all these good people were forced to acknowledge that current policy on Europe has suffered a resounding setback. What else could they do? They even bandied words like "failings", "convulsions" and "chaos". Oddly, but completely in character with their bourgeois political commitments, none of them could see that what causes it is this bourgeois Europe's destructive nature. They simply could not see that what people were rejecting was precisely this Europe.

In general, they were all self-critical, although almost all of them more or less blamed the government and Hollande

personally, except for the Socialist Party – and Green – representatives. But let's not exaggerate. Any normal person – if he or she were childishly naïve – would expect these politicians and journalists to apologise for carrying out the European policies that the voters massively rejected. Far from it! Every single one re-stated their commitment to those very same policies, then beat their breasts for not having done more to explain (!?) the setback their bourgeois Europe had suffered. But in fact this Europe has been so well explained, not only by pervasive and aggressive propaganda but also by an eloquently destructive practice, that voters rejected it precisely because they know exactly what it means.

### **Socialist Party leaders just as perverse**

This sort of collective blindness on the part of politicians and journalists discussing the stinging rebuff their Europe had suffered is truly amazing. It presents a striking and repulsive image of the system's so-called "elite" which absolutely captures its decadent nature. What it foreshadows – should its miserable existence be prolonged – is an uncertain future full of looming threats, convulsions, pain and repeated shocks.

But the (socialist) government promptly also went in for denial of reality. TV viewers saw a clearly shocked Prime Minister Valls nevertheless insisting that the measures he has been taking in recent times are exactly what the voters wanted. To tell the truth, he had to blind himself to reality so absurdly just to justify staying in government. But so contemptuous a distortion of the truth was contradicted not only by the facts but also the prime minister's haggard and extremely upset appearance and his dazed and lugubrious tone, which clashed oddly with the artificial joviality he sometimes affects in his new role. He really looked like he was falling apart under the seismic impact.

We should point out immediately that the very next day Hollande stubbornly and unblushingly confirmed that they would carry on with their criminal policies which, together with their "responsibility plan", he presented as if it was what the voters said they wanted! This shameless arrogance went much, much further than even Valls' insolent effrontery. The wily old politician's practised and cool cynicism in political lying made up for the panic his rattled minister showed. Just like all their pseudo-opponents, they both attributed the voters' general rejection of the bourgeoisie to the weakness and inadequacy of the propaganda explaining what they thought and what they were doing in relation to Europe. This brutal travesty of the truth foreshadows a swift deterioration in already difficult living conditions and even greater shocks in future.

### **Others make headway in the absence of working-class politics**

The most telling feature of these elections has been the striking absence of genuine workers' parties. More exactly: none of the various political organisations which actually fight against the bourgeoisie's policy on Europe – and to their credit they undeniably do that – have managed to free themselves from major shortcomings which show their dependence on the bourgeoisie.

For one thing, they do not go beyond a very restricted level of simply criticising the bourgeoisie's policy on Europe. None of them has yet been able to open a concrete perspective of a working-class Europe radically opposed to the kind of Europe the bourgeoisie are concocting. For another, and bound up with this negative position, each of them has developed their criticisms over Europe firmly within the limitations of their own strictly national framework, except for a few sentimental rather than effective solidarity links and the occasional sprinkling of gatherings and resolutions left over from the past.

Altogether and in general, all these organisations are therefore captives of the given capitalist system and submit to its pressure. Here, too, they are still largely influenced, by the enduring ideology of social democracy and Stalinism, whose national, not to say nationalist, political horizon has always been a bulwark against internationalist Marxism. The few scattered allusions to the Socialist United States of Europe we get from certain organisations of Trotskyist origin do not change anything in this general picture, since these chance references are completely detached from daily reality, hanging in mid-air and placed as far in the future as religion's Kingdom of Heaven.

Under these conditions, the rout inflicted upon the bourgeoisie's policy over Europe has led to not only a spectacular resurgence of fascist and semi-fascist organisations but also the emergence and proliferation of petit-bourgeois formations in general. (We leave aside, for the moment, analysing the considerable advances by UKIP in the UK and the People's Party in Denmark, both of which came first. They campaign openly for putting the bourgeoisie back in the driving seat and, in order to do so, they make abundant use of fascist ammunition against impoverished peoples and the migrants from their ranks and for the restoration of the national state).

As for the advances made by the fascists, it is significant that bourgeois commentators try to console themselves over the setback they have suffered with the thought that the fascists are unable to form a homogenous group in the European Parliament. Splitting hairs like this is pathetic in itself, since instead of explaining why the fascists are growing so strongly, they try to make it disappear by exploiting a problem that arises precisely from their growth. Nevertheless, it is true that there are differences, not to say considerable divergences between them. Maybe you cannot identify Nigel Farage's British UKIP with Golden Dawn in Greece modelled on

Hitler's Nazi party, or even with the Front National in France. Nevertheless this UKIP, like the Danish People's Party, draws its politics from the same fascist arsenal. Their frenzied nationalism and clear orientation towards re-establishing a strong national state together with aggression against migrant workers and peoples of the former colonies and dependent states puts them in the same camp of semi-fascists and impels them in that direction.

From a different point of view, the idea that in the past all fascist parties stuck together in unity was always a myth invented by the bourgeoisie – and Stalinists. There were well-known differences and divergences, even between Hitler and Mussolini, for example and even when they were fighting on the same side, which tended to iron them out. To say nothing of the distinctions between Franco's party and Salazar's and others, or the military dictatorships drawn into Hitler's gravitational field.

This crying absence of genuine workers' politics is also what has allowed a set of straightforwardly petit-bourgeois political parties to flourish like mushrooms after rain. They, too, are distinguished from each other in various ways, but in a quite different fashion from the fascist or semi-fascist organisations whose open and resolute support for capitalism unifies them on the extreme right. At the same time there is a significant difference between the majority of the petit-bourgeois organisations developing a critique of bourgeois politics from the left of the political chess-board and others who try to maintain a pseudo-independence. What they all have in common, for all their often quite broad political diversity, is the attempt to camouflage society's division into classes. They replace this with secondary and sometimes quite odd problems on the basis of a shared and savage hostility to the conception of class struggle and Marxism in general.

Whether these organisations are right or left, older and

larger, like the ecologists, or recent and local like "Podemos" in Spain, we can for the moment postpone their examination, necessary as it may be. On the other hand, there are, in France at least, organisations which claim to speak on behalf of working people about which it has become essential to reflect seriously.

### **Where do Left Front and its European partners stand?**

The Left Front coalition, which took off big time in a left-radical way during the presidential elections and since, has quite rightly raised many hopes. It created confidence that a big, genuine workers' party could replace the old, compromised social-democratic and Stalinist parties mired in class-collaboration. Consequently it also embodied the concrete possibility of the re-birth and development of the new, big revolutionary party the situation requires. And that is why, despite the inevitable and tenacious residues of its origins which blemish its activities and retard its development, it was necessary to encourage and support this initiative. It marked and expressed the possibility of a renewal of the revolutionary movement in the face of the opportunist decadence of the traditional workers' parties and also the sterile blind alley in which various organisations with a more and more blurred reference to Trotskyism find themselves. The fact that more or less identical movements came about and developed in Greece (Syriza) and Germany (Die Linke) indicated that the conditions for their existence were not only present in Europe but had also matured.

However, while supporting the Left Front, we have had to intensify our criticisms around the negative character of its political line, i.e. its reduction to a simple critique of current policy and striking lack of a workers' programme for fighting the bourgeoisie. After the municipal elections, our journal *Lutte des Classes* (no 22) wrote that in the absence of such a programme "the Left Front is condemned to mark time while the National Front has made considerable progress,

including among discontented workers.” (English translation printed in *Workers' International Journal* no 5, June 2014). A month later, just before the European elections, we anticipated in the same journal (no 24) that “Perhaps a pathetic result at the ballot box will shake these organisations' centrist outlook and unleash a movement for their renewal. It is a hope to cling to”. (English translation printed in *Workers' International Journal* no 5, June 2014).

Indeed, the Left Front's disastrous election results fully confirmed these fears and our criticisms. In view not just of the much better results they had got in the presidential elections but also the much worse current situation, their miserable 6.3% of the vote represents an obvious decline. This real collapse exposes a disparity, not to say a contradiction, between the Left Front's programme on the one hand and the steadily worsening situation working people face on the other. But sadly, the initial reactions to this resounding defeat are worse than disappointing, expressing a level of astonishment at the meagre results matched only by an inability to comprehend them.

The morning after the elections, J.-L. Mélançon presented his party cadres and the media with the plaintive and tearful commentary of a beaten chief. He more or less repeated what he had said on TV the previous night (mentioned above). He was so grief-stricken that he could hardly hold back the tears and he drew his comments to a rapid close to avoid breaking out in sobs.

This physically awkward appearance itself revealed a man moaning on at his wits' end rather than a fighter reflecting on the lessons of a temporary defeat. Indeed, the lamentable way he presented his interpretation of the results completely matched the whining and recriminatory content of his remarks. Faced with the cresting progress of the National Front, he lost any sense of proportion and got bitterly distressed about this “end of civilisation”(?), just as over the top as a few

days earlier when he had shown boundless confidence that the Left Front would amaze everyone with how well it would do. (Sadly, the phenomenon this exaggerated and one-sided judgement failed to address was the very high level of abstentions.)

He said absolutely nothing about the possibility that his own organisation's political line might be mistaken – any such idea seemed to be outlandish, not to say sacrilegious – so all that remained was for him to try to lay the blame on the situation and/or working people. Comrade Melancon avoided saying it outright, but at the end of his breast-beating he couldn't stop himself from appealing to working people to take heart again and see where their real interests lay, which was a barely-disguised way of making them responsible for the setback.

Syriza in Greece, with visibly the same politics, did manage to come out clearly on top in the elections with 26.6% of the votes, but that was solely because the situation there is different and more favourable. The bankruptcy of Pasok, the social-democratic party, already happened earlier. Together with the servile way the bourgeois New Democracy party fell into line behind Brussels and its Troika, this opened the door wide for Syriza, and this was extended even further by the openly and repellently Hitlero-fascist politics of Golden Dawn. However, these more advantageous conditions should not make us forget that the conservatives came hard on Syriza's heels with 23.1% of the votes, while here, too, abstentions amounted to more than 40% of the electorate. In Germany die Linke also saw their share of the vote drop to 6.5%, more or less the same as Left Front, given that quite a number of voters could see no difference between this formation and the SPD (Social-Democratic Party of Germany) in "opposition".

As for Tsipras (Syriza) standing against Barroso in the election of the new President of the European Commission, this was just opportunist grandstanding. By doing this, these

parties justified and legitimated this instrument of bourgeois dictatorship for grinding the working people of Europe under the iron heel of its policies. Tsipras' political line, with a tinge of anti-German feeling (such is his nationalist resentment at the supremacy of German capital within the bourgeoisie's arrangements) clearly express the content of this opportunism. What it actually indicates is that he thought – and still thinks – that he can use the same rotten and anti-democratic organs ... for policies in favour of working people. This involves bourgeois policies without austerity, a big investment programme, a New Deal, he says credulously. So it's no surprise that now, instead of Barroso, he is backing Juncker from Luxembourg, the close and fervent friend of the big bankers, the initiator and boss of the hated Troika! There's only one way to describe this kind of clowning: going backwards.

### **Responsibility of the traditional far left**

The general decline in these promising formations (with the exception of Syriza in Greece where it is prospering due to various objective factors) is completely mirrored by the spectacular advances the far right is making. Now such symmetry is not somehow caused by the balance of nature; the pitiful retreat by the former has directly conditioned the considerable progress the latter have made. But where is the so-called Marxist far left?

If one looks in France, for example – and also at a European level – , for reasons why it has not been possible to re-discover and develop a genuine workers' programme, there is no doubt that a significant share of the responsibility rests with the three biggest organisations which have come out of Trotskyism and profess that tradition. Without of course pretending to be able to describe them completely here, some general comments are required in relation to this responsibility.

First and foremost, for all the differences of outlook between the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA of Alain Krivine and Olivier Besancenot), Lutte Ouvriere (LO, Workers Fight, formerly of Arlette Laguiller) and the Lambertist Parti des Travailleurs (Workers Party), differences due mainly to their respective histories, all these organisations have taken a negative attitude towards the Left Front. They have regarded this newcomer with a lot of distrust and not a little jealousy: after all, they come from the suspect milieu of social democracy and Stalinism and, what's much worse, trespassed on private hunting preserves.

From the outset they carefully avoid getting "compromised" with the Communist Party and Melanchon's new party in the Left Front, which they treated with hostile suspicion. Moreover, they unanimously rejected the slightest sustained cooperation in struggle, a united front, indeed, and even any electoral alliance with these plague-carriers who had come to disturb their established daily routine. In fact, after the last big battle of clarification in Trotskyist ranks in 1952-1953, they settled down comfortably into their special role of licensed public revolutionary, a role they practice according to an arcane ritual they call Marxism. In fact it was and remains a profanation of the Marxist method, opposed to it in every way and which, to put it briefly, consists in trying to separate and fix, restrict and freeze the conditions of struggle, in particular the activity and circumference of the revolutionary organisation.

How can you expect these organisations to apply the policy of the united front or join in this Left Front coalition or at least form an electoral alliance with it, when they have been virtually incapable of establishing such an alliance between themselves for the last 60 (!) years.

Since the 1952-1953 split, the ditch separating them has just got bigger and bigger and each on its own side has settled into the split in the Fourth International as an eternal

destiny in which each one has its own special corner. They have demonstrated their complete incapacity to sort out rebuilding the Fourth International, considering the two other organisations to be enemies definitively and totally lost to that process of rebuilding. In the absence of any ability to resolve or even confront the problem at the base of the break (i.e. the problem of re-building), the split intensified further and dramatically the original cause of the separation, that is, Pabloite revisionism, systematising it into generalised opportunism via Mandel's "neo-capitalism" and finally culminating in the furtive abandonment of Marxism. But this fatalistic mutual acceptance of the break, on the other hand, also reinforced the sectarian isolation of the anti-Pabloite critics, fixed their sterile enclosure in the ivory towers of their verities singularly lacking in any perspective that offered a solution.

Where did this monumental historical deficiency arise from, a deficiency whose effects have gone on for decades and transformed what started off as a split into a veritable dislocation of the International, then into today's yawning abyss where, alongside false propositions, reaction too takes root?

Throughout their history, the French Trotskyist organisations (like the others) have been more or less intensely affected by the influence of Stalinist conceptions, often preponderant and always corrosive. Even while Trotsky was still alive, this defect was made considerably worse by the petit-bourgeois composition of the organisation, driven to the margins of the workers' movement by the Stalinists. After Trotsky's assassination, followed by the total collapse at the end of the war and then the split, whatever organisations emerged divided again, not between the real Marxists and the others, but along the lines of the various – but all equally mistaken – strategic versions which the Stalinists applied in the course of their history. The different Trotskyist

organisations followed either Stalinism's right-wing orientation, or the ultra-leftism of the "Third Period". Very often they mixed the opportunism of the one with the sectarianism of the other.

But as concerns the method of political struggle in general and building the party in particular, the former Pabloites currently in the NPA, the Lambertists in the parti des travailleurs and Lutte Ouvriere invariably shared the same outrageous sectarianism, firstly towards the other "Trotskyist" tendencies and then in relation to the workers' movement as a whole. They looked at the Left Front in the same way.

Trotsky once commented that the Stalinists regarded Rosa Luxemburg with a great deal of suspicion, unable to tell whether she was a friend or an enemy. Now the NPA, with its Pabloite origins, looks askance at the Left Front in exactly the same way (not, of course, that that makes the Left Front into any sort of Rosa Luxemburg). These hesitations have, nevertheless, already caused a number of splits in the NPA. First, a group led by Christian Picquet, then another one, split away and joined the Left Front. These breaks, however, have not led to the necessary re-awakening of the organisation as a whole. So the groups that split away have maintained their centrist character and remained unable to change anything at all in the Left Front., while the NPA has continued its unprincipled hesitation waltz.

As for Lutte Ouvrière, it has continued imperturbably on its solitary way, marked from its very origins by hostility to the proclamation of the Fourth International and by its nationalist seclusion. It persists in its isolation with an inveterate sectarianism in which both their behaviour and the arguments they use look strangely similar to the ultra-left politics of "Third Period" Stalinism. True to form, this organisation gleefully reported the Left Front's latest electoral setback as if this justified its hostility to the

Front.

One can describe Lutte Ouvrière's sectarianism as intrinsic. That of the Lambertist organisation, on the other hand, is, one might say, "tempered" by its special and occasional opportunism (in contrast to the more generalised opportunism of the NPA). The Lambertist organisation is sectarian in relation to the Front de Gauche and the CFDT trade union and even the CGT, but flatly opportunist in relation to the Force Ouvrière trade union, which has been its privileged partner since that union came into being. Apart from its opportunism towards social democracy, which it likes to identify with the working class, the Lambertist organisation's Achilles' heel is its inclination to substitute the struggle for national sovereignty for the international class struggle. And so in 2013 the congress of their "International" suddenly decide to concentrate the international mobilisation of its militants in the "defence" of Algeria against some imaginary threat of US military intervention! Obviously this "threat" never materialised, but the whole thing worked marvellously to distract the attention of activists from, for example, the problems of Europe.

So, with either an occasional or an intrinsic sectarian conception (which they claim to be Marxist) in relation to every other organisation such as the Left Front, they too took their own lonely, isolated stand in the recent European elections. Obviously (what is more) they lacked a clear working-class policy on Europe dealing with concrete and current problems. And of course they each in their own corner garnered about 1% of the vote – actually worse than usual, while the Left Front just got weaker.

Such sectarian outlooks, and the concomitant opportunism, are the natural products of an aristocratic conception of the party (their party!), separated from the workers' movement as a whole in a water-tight compartment, whose building is reduced to the rigorous and individual selection of the few

elect into a separate elite. This sect conception, detached and distant from the masses, is only applicable at most to clandestine conditions, but it is disastrous in open political struggle. Right through modern history, it has been opposed to Marxism and its application. Since the Communist Manifesto, Marxism has clearly established, against any sectarian or elitist point of view, that it is the workers' movement as a whole, all the changes it undergoes and the methods it uses, that constitute not just the terrain but the very skeleton of the revolutionary party itself.

The Manifesto unequivocally emphasised: "The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to other working-class parties. They have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole". Nor do they "set up any sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement". And in conclusion: "the communists everywhere support every revolutionary movement against the existing political and social order of things". Political – and theoretical – struggle unfolds within this framework as a necessary means of clarification, not as some sort of selection criterion.

Now isolated and besieged as it was, and giving way to the pressure of capital, Stalinism in the USSR perverted Marxism, including Lenin's heritage. They adapted it to the requirements of staying in power: conciliatory towards capital and violently opposed to the workers' movement as a whole. Once Trotsky was lost, his heirs in turn succumbed to this de-natured and corrupt "Marxism".

Concretely each and every one of these "Trotskyist" formations think that in and through itself the revolutionary party already exists, and building it is simply a matter of linear and progressive growth through recruiting individuals one after another. With strictly individual recruitment of this sort – which is normal in a secret society but absolutely alien to Marxism – they can denounce all other

organisations, lumping their members together with their leaderships.

These organisations are condemned to decline, although this is masked and retarded by their prolonged vegetation, punctuated by successive electoral setbacks. It is a fact which should stir their members to study past and recent experiences very carefully and draw the necessary conclusions, especially since the long decades of defeats and setbacks the international workers' movement has suffered, made particularly worse by the liquidation of the USSR and the changes in the composition of the working class, have profoundly altered the habitually-known conditions for resuming the struggle.

The essential feature in these negative changes has been the general repudiation of Marxism and socialism at the same time as the Soviet Union collapsed and was disowned. Since this workers' state was associated with the Stalinist bureaucratic regime, Marxism in turn was identified with the falsification of it at the hands of the same bureaucracy. The whole thing was greatly facilitated by the evolution and changing composition of the working class which was happening at the same time and the growth of petit-bourgeois intermediary layers. The results were not long in coming: On the one hand a shrinkage and ossification of living Marxism reduced to the level of dogma in ancient texts; on the other, a more and more flagrant contradiction between the growing size of the mass movements and their theoretical poverty, not to say the complete absence of any theory. Under these conditions, the masses' apprenticeship in struggle needs more explanations and time, and activists' development requires much more patience.

### **Ramblings based on impressions replacing theory**

Flagrant impotence, therefore, is sadly what characterises all the organisations on the far left who oppose bourgeois politics and its Europe. Their impotence in a situation which should actually favour their development means we must

undertake a serious critique of the theoretical arsenal underlying the political dead-end they are in.

We have already glanced at the way the organisations which arose out of the dislocation and often repudiation of the Fourth International share responsibility for the Left Front's stagnation. They have been through a long death-agony and floundered, inflicting their own death-blow by repudiating or diluting the Marxism that alone could provide a theoretical, either by simply and clearly dropping it (NPA), or by letting it ossify into a collection of classical assertions ("Lutte Ouvrière" and the Lambertists).

Consequently there has been no pressure on the Left Front on sharpen up its theoretical armaments by accepting and developing creative Marxism, so that it remains captive to profoundly mistaken theoretical considerations which it peddles, like birth-marks inherited from its social-democratic and Stalinist parentage and which tie it to the existing social and political order. A recent work by the Left Party's leading economist, Jacques Généreux, provides a useful opportunity to evaluate concretely the dominant theoretical conceptions in the Left Front. *Jacques Généreux explique l'économie à tout le monde (Jacques Généreux Explains Economics for All)* is a 331-page book published quite recently (May 2014) by Seuil. It sums up rather well the theoretical nonsense the Left Front has strayed into, but which affects all organisations on the far left to one degree or another.

This economic inspirer of the Left Front thinks that the post-war period known as the "thirty glorious years" of the economy "... which persisted until the 70s, had very little to do with capitalism in the strict sense." (p.41), because "... the big industrial countries developed in a new system in which the holders of capital no longer had complete freedom or the powers which that confers". (p.42) It is important to note that as far as he is concerned, this "new system" is the goal for which we must strive.

To bolster this bold and surprising conclusion he lists some of the rules he claims limited the omnipotence of capital, although he carefully avoids putting a name to this "new system" which supposedly replaced capitalism. This prudent approach enables him later to note that during the 1980s capitalism returned in strength, simply thanks to various counter measures.

We should not waste too much time on this – to put it mildly – extremely cavalier way of dealing with the change of a whole mode of production, which in principle (and in historical practice) can only be the outcome of significant social factors accompanied by political overturns. We merely need to underline that this crude and simplistic view exposes total ignorance, not just of the real reason for the "thirty glorious years", but also of the resounding social struggles that took place during those years. In fact it is fairly easy to understand the historical movement of powerful social and political forces whose interaction engendered these so-called "thirty glorious years".

Capitalism entered the war in order to suppress its insurmountable and prolonged economic political crisis which broke out in 1929. It came out of the war in 1944-1945 even weaker and more exhausted than at the beginning. In the course of the war the relationship of forces between it and the world working class had shifted strongly in favour of the latter. From the beginning of 1943, the proletarian revolution was spreading in several countries in Europe and Asia, stimulated by the Soviet Union's Red Army's powerful offensive.

The bourgeois political regimes which had been vassals of fascism or had fallen victim to it collapsed one after the other. The revolution was on the march – but enemies were at work within its own ranks. Above all, it was the active collaboration of the leaderships of the workers' movement, the Stalinist parties especially and in particular, which saved the capitalist system from total collapse, a powerful rescue

operation prepared and orchestrated by the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union as a resolute ally of the "democratic" bourgeoisie.

Now if this new-style Holy Alliance actually did strangle the revolution, which failed everywhere (except in Yugoslavia and China, where it was brought to an abrupt halt) it nevertheless left a deep impression on the bourgeois regimes which re-emerged after the war. In other words, the bourgeoisie's faithful servants who had sold the revolution for a mess of pottage had to be rewarded. Within a relationship of forces clearly in favour of the proletariat, this mess of pottage had to be paid for.

Such was the particular class configuration which formed the basis for the "thirty glorious years", whose backcloth was the open and direct going-over of the Stalinist bureaucracy and its agents as a whole to the active counter-revolution. To be sure, they did not perform this immense service for free and without a recompense that let them justify and retain their influence. The extent of the concessions the bourgeoisie granted in turn reflected the degree of danger that menaced capitalism. It also demonstrated the bourgeoisie's great fear, since it went very far into these compromises in its concern to preserve the system, even so far as to grant concessions which altered its very appearance, and to adjust the form of its rule. It changed its face without altering its character. The capitalist wolf mutated into a loving grandmother who carefully retained her "big teeth".

A lot of people were fooled by this ability of the bourgeoisie to manoeuvre in order to stay in power. The whole of what they call the "Left" fell for it. The chief ideologue of the Left Party, the economist Jacques Généreux, expresses this fundamental and general error like this: "Between 1945 and 1975, many industrial countries were no longer within a real capitalist economy. What rescued the industrialised countries from the damage caused by capitalism ... is precisely they fact

that they got out of the capitalist system as Marx described it. In place of this capitalism ... they substituted a mixed and highly-regulated economy in which salaried managers and civil servants had more power than the capitalists." (p.43).

Here, Jacques Généreux says openly what people on the "Left" and even many on the far left thought more quietly without daring to put it so crudely. This way of looking at things rests entirely on the firm conviction that this whole lucky mutation came from the bourgeoisie itself which, acting freely and of its own accord, decided to make capitalism more bearable out of its infinite wisdom and magnanimity.

The class struggle, indeed any sort of struggle at all, is totally conjured away in this imaginary society ruled by understanding and discernment. The theoretical crutch upon which this conception rests presents itself as an obviously wrong interpretation of Marxism, which Généreux reduces to a few formulae, missing out the essential part. This is indicated already by the simple fact that throughout the whole 331 page book the word "class" (to say nothing of "class struggle") does not even appear!

The basis for this misunderstanding and, more concretely, the idyllic transformation of capitalism into a regulated and more humane (but undefined) system is, therefore, an obvious ignorance of capitalism itself. To be more exact, it is a total misunderstanding (or deliberate omission) of its nature and its historic evolution, as well as of their inner driving forces and content. Even more concretely, it is capitalism moving on from its classic, ascendant phase to its decline, death-agony and the manifold determinations involved which are missing in this fixed, immobile, capitalism. It is a well-known procedure frequently used by pseudo-Marxists who refer to Marx but deliberately leave out how Lenin and Trotsky developed his theory. This is how they strip Marxism precisely of its spirit as an analysis of living reality and petrify it into ancient immutable texts.

This is the method Jacques Généreux uses too when, claiming to present Marx's conception, he carefully excises Lenin's contribution. This surgical operation allows him to present the way capitalism was rescued from complete collapse by making concessions (1945-75) into proof that it had metamorphosed into a higher social order. Alchemists of old had a similar blind confidence in the miraculous ability of base lead to mutate into noble glittering gold. But in the end science taught us that that kind of transubstantiation exists in religious beliefs, but not among the natural elements, nor in social reality.

This kind of superstitious speculation abounds in Jacques Généreux's book when it comes to the desirability and possibility of a repeating the "thirty glorious years" in today's base society. They replace any serious reflection of the programme which flows from the situation itself, since they are so pervasive that they simply push aside the harsh realities of everyday life. But essentially this unbridled speculation masks and hides above all the reality of the concrete and particular historical conditions of the "thirty glorious years".

The first condition for the really significant concessions made in those post-war years was the actual strength of the working class in the industrial countries, where revolutionary movements (and a series of revolutions) placed the capitalist order in mortal danger. But also the imperilled bourgeoisie, weakened as it was, had to be able to offer concessions, even on a temporary and cavalier basis, by digging even deeper into its own shrinking reserves. Finally, it also required that at the head of the revolutionary working class there should be degenerated and corrupt leaderships prepared to sell the revolution out cheaply in exchange for these concessions, while still able to produce arguments to justify imposing this abuse of authority.

Not a single one of these conditions is fulfilled today, or to

be more precise, that are radically changed. The powerful and vigorous working class of then has suffered crucial successive defeats, and the endless retreats have merged into one general rout. Moreover, it has seen its forces drastically diminished, its make-up radically changed and its movement now only a shadow of what it was at the end of the war. Moreover, not only has it become impossible for the bourgeoisie to offer anything whatsoever to working people, its decline has grown even worse and impels it to violently and dictatorially destroy all past reforms and concessions, something it finds easier because of the weakening of the workers' movement. We should add that, following their open and brutal collaboration, the bureaucratic leaderships of the workers' movement have lost their former decisive position in the workers' movement. The historic defeat of Stalinism and social democracy's open avowed and cynical role as a direct pillar of the bourgeoisie have practically put an end to their organisational grip on the working class. (Even if the influence of their conceptions is still rife and serves to muddle the political consciousness of the majority of left and far-left activists.)

And this is how it goes with the Left Front and Left Party, one of whose most significant leaders, G n reux, in his book not only heaps praises on the class collaboration of the "thirty glorious years" but advocates a return to these policies as the right and proper programme with which to oppose the devastation caused by austerity. But we have just seen that the very specific social and political conditions, historically determined by particular circumstances, which combined to give birth to this special form of class collaboration, have disappeared. More concretely, the quite exceptional relationship of class forces at the time, with a working class on the offensive against a bourgeoisie forced onto the defensive and retreat, has today turned into its opposite.

It is the bourgeoisie which has taken the initiative and developed a general offensive against a working class weakened and disarmed, destroying their previous gains. Trying to force the bourgeoisie to make significant concessions when it is developing an offensive against a working class in disorganised retreat, quite apart from betraying a petit-bourgeois expectation of alms from the master, is in any case a terrible nonsense which confuses two entirely different situations.

In concrete daily politics, this muddle inevitably appears as a serious mistake, as Généreux's book as a whole illustrates. The endless rambling about the possible and desirable changes in capitalism prevent him from even mentioning the current and real bourgeois offensive against all the gains that working people have made. And so fundamental problems of the day, such as the growth in unemployment, the unbearably high levels of debt, the rapid fall in wages in the face of overwhelming price rises, and the continuous dismantling of rights and benefits, to mention only a few, are completely missing from this book. So it's no surprise that one looks in vain for any sort of programme that could respond to these problems which workers face every day. All you can hope for is that something (the Holy Ghost, perhaps?) will touch the bourgeoisie and inspire it to transform its offensive against the working class into a new version of the "thirty glorious years".

It seems little short of incredible that activists endowed with the capacity to reflect, the will to fight and solid experience should fall for such twaddle. But in the Left Front and certain other far-left organisations, it is nonsense of this kind that guides and orientates their struggles. There is, therefore, an absolute contradiction between their sincere commitment to changing the world and the skimpy, retrograde conceptions which tie them to this world. That is why the main task is to overcome this contradiction by adopting a conception and policies in total harmony with this real

determination to change the world.

### **For a radical theoretical and political turn by the far left**

Theoretical and political independence in relation to capitalism, its system and its bourgeois class, is the indispensable condition for establishing harmony between, on the one hand, sincere and ambitious aspirations and, on the other, limited objectives of the struggle. Only that sort of independence allows a concrete perspective to be defined which actually goes beyond the system. All past and recent history proves that, without independence of that kind, even the firmest determination to change capitalism is reduced to patching it up, and that in principle this can only work in the short term.

But this theoretical and political independence cannot be the fruit of disembodied speculation or mental play. It is rooted in the working class, whose existence and fate are tied to those of capital, but opposed to them in a profoundly contradictory way. Hence the indissoluble organic link between theoretical and political independence vis-à-vis capital and the struggle of the working class. Now, only Marxism expresses this cohesion and thus puts into words the necessary class independence in thought and action. *All* other theories are tied to this system or inevitably fall back into its well-worn tracks. That is why this theory alone clearly says that, instead of trying to patch up capital's dilapidated and unhinged system, the central and immediate task is to overthrow it and move on to socialism. In conclusion, the historic task of the moment is reduced to and concentrated in a vigorous return to Marxism and its reaffirmation as the theory and guiding thread of the political activity of all organisations fighting against the grip of capital.

However, as the election results have repeatedly and relentlessly confirmed, the prospects of the Left Front and die Linke in Germany have been broadly compromised. These two

coalitions, in thrall to their reformist theories, are seriously threatened with disappearing or shrivelling into political insignificance. (Syriza in Greece still has the benefit of a respite due to the specific situation in that country.)

Sadly, the Left Front obviously lacks the internal resources which could enable it on its own to make the veritable leap that is necessary if it is to turn to Marxism. From now on it is useless and in fact damaging to hang around waiting for any such "cultural revolution" on its part. Instead of that kind of turn, it is attempting to avoid the more and more obvious fate that awaits it with a confused and many-hued mixture of inconsistent scraps and reformist recipes. Its recent political evolution proves this.

Within the structure of the Left Front, the weight of those formations which, formally at least, linked it to Marxism and the workers' movement has noticeably diminished and that of those which came from other horizons grown (obviously one is not speaking here of the Communist Party, which long ago silently dropped even the caricature of Marxism to which it used to lay claim). For example there were groups which broke away from the NPA (Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste – New Anti-capitalist Party) like that led by Christian Picquet and others, which have lost their role and significance in this coalition, whereas the frankly petit-bourgeois group "Ensemble" ("Together") of Clémentine Autain, a loose, obscure and indeterminate assemblage, is coming to the fore. This surely represents a political slide to the right on the part of the Front, despite the fact that the groups coming from the NPA have shown not the slightest aptitude to inspire anyone with Marxism. Faithful to their Pabloite heritage, they have continued their old politics of adaptation, this time not to triumphant Stalinism but the reformism pervasive in the Left Front. Nevertheless, their loss of influence has loosened even further the Left Front's already tenuous links with Marxist

traditions.

Finally, like a drowning man clutching at a straw, the Left Front has clung even closer to the “enrichment” offered by the environmentalists and their doctrine. But environmentalism (and the politics of the “Greens” as a whole) is another way – different from the well-known, traditional, reformism – of asserting that it is possible to cure capitalist society, i.e. to maintain it, through ecological rather than socialist policies and measures. In this it is (if possible) more reactionary than traditional reformism: politically further to the right and intellectually inferior, since it squarely abandons the concrete social terrain to situate its struggle elsewhere, in man’s (general!) relationship with nature – much to the delight of the capitalists! In line with this evasion, it turns its back on the workers’ movement, in particular the trade unions, to place itself in the heart of the urban petit-bourgeoisie. And then, since unlike traditional reformism, it has been and remains utterly incapable of producing a perspective, a general theoretical vision, it does not even have a coherent political programme and makes do with negative criticisms and repeating a few nostrums.

Now the Left Front (or concretely its political motor force, the Left Party) has turned even more closely towards these reactionary ersatz politics, decorating its wobbly political line with a few environmentalist trimmings. This highly-embroidered adventure it has baptised “eco-socialism”, which strictly speaking is entirely devoid of meaning. What it does actually mean, very clearly, is that the Left Party (the Left Front), instead of drawing closer to Marxism, is moving even further away. Two very important political conclusions flow from this.

The first is that, despite everything, the Left Front’s retreat and its slide to the right should not serve as an alibi for abandoning it or turning one’s back on it. Despite

all its growing imperfections, its petit-bourgeois and centrist character, it remains the only political formation which has not renounced its opposition to the policy of the bourgeoisie. It thus still has within it the real possibility of developing and improving that fight and the struggle for Marxism. It is the natural crucible par excellence for these battles.

The second conclusion is precisely the lesson that the initiative for a renewal of Marxism can only come from outside the Left Front, in particular those organisations linked to Marxism and the working class movement.

However, we have seen that the three political formations which claim to be Marxist are incapable, as organisations, of providing an impulse of that sort. Their Marxism, if they still profess it, is nothing but a collection of bookish and formal references to old texts, detached from current reality. The politics they carry out alongside these references flagrantly contradicts them. From that point of view their policy on Europe and their attitude to other anti-bourgeois organisations are equally eloquent.

Under these conditions, the impulse can only come from an organisation (or organisations?) which, like Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International, openly and publicly fight for the renewal of Marxism and for socialism cleansed of Stalinist dross. It goes without saying that such a struggle ought to rally and unite all those who, though they may be in separate organisations, wish to fight openly for genuine Marxism and revived socialism.

By *Balazs Nagy*, July 2014

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# On some lessons of the French municipal elections (March 2014)

By *Balazs Nagy*, April 2014

The entire French press is unanimous. Whether left or right in their traditional political colouration – the difference is actually pretty superficial – they compare the so-called socialist party's resounding discomfiture in the municipal elections to Napoleons historic disaster on the Berezina River in Russia in 1812, the prelude to his ultimate defeat. For once the accuracy of their judgement is beyond dispute. So our first response is above all to see what we can learn. Its a perfectly straightforward and normal thing to do, although our conclusions differ noticeably from everyone else's.

First of all it is important to emphasise that elections change absolutely nothing in the fundamentals of the capitalist social system or, therefore, in the overall situation. This view is sharply opposed to the popular belief carefully fostered by the usual politicians and organisations of the left. Even if elections do change that systems form or shape, they move within the framework it imposes and are an integral part of it. Whether municipal, parliamentary or European, they are just part of how the (most democratic!) system in place functions, while remaining profoundly bound to the way it moves and works.

How true this is has been more than adequately demonstrated, and two major and opposed schools of thought on the matter were in evidence during the elections. One body of opinion – an extremely heterogeneous one (especially if you include the right wingers) – traditionally asserts that elections really can bring about effective changes in the system. It has to be

said, regretfully, that even a party such as the Front de Gauche (Left Front) and its component parts – which we see as actually standing on the side of working people, and as such on our side too – remains a prisoner to these blinkered electoral (parliamentary) politics. Its leaders, in effect, leave us to suppose mistakenly, or even themselves assert, that a strong showing (and all the more so outright victory) at the polls would enable them radically to change the capitalist social system.

### **Abstentions are a kind of vote**

In contrast to these shallow parliamentary politics, another large and growing section of the population regularly and deliberately abstain. Although municipal elections supposedly affect people more directly, these latest ones saw record abstention levels of 36.6 per cent, particularly among young people.

Most bourgeois politicians and commentators get onto their moral high horse over this. They have the nerve to impugn such peoples republican credentials, and the audacity to accuse them of helping the right wing. Here or there, the reproach is added that they make it impossible for the Left Front and/or its component parts to make consistent progress, and so change the system.

These abstentions, however, express a definite verdict on the existing capitalist system as a whole, fundamentally rejecting it and repudiating the absurd belief that voting can change the system. In this sense, they are right and we defend them against those republican paragons of (questionable) virtue, even though we think that abstaining is negative and sterile and therefore inadequate.

An accurate map showing the percentage of voters who abstained in the recent French municipal elections would clearly show another France living on the periphery of the cities in the

proletarian banlieues. It is working-class France, including the unemployed, suffering under savage austerity. The bourgeois press was so bold as to reveal a tiny corner of its extent and significance. In Paris red belt there were 58.6 per cent abstentions in Ivry, 56.8 in Stains, 56.7 in Vitry-sur-Seine; then 56.7 per cent in Vaux-en-Velin in the outer suburbs of Lyon and 55.5 per cent in the disaster-stricken working-class town of Roubaix in the North. The figure is the same for Trappes in the outer suburbs of Paris, the biggest victims of galloping inequality. Bourgeois journalists and all the petit-bourgeois milieu editorialise about this in the abstract – wringing their hands over the losses suffered by the middle class! The working class and its fate simply disappear from these peoples preoccupations. This arises from a deliberate desire to minimise this dangerous class's importance, even to the point of denying its existence. So you can bet they will never draw up any such map because it would cast rather a pall over their chatter and somewhat upset their peace of mind.

### **On the importance of elections**

Elections cannot change the capitalist system (as we can see in the daily more severe blows it inflicts on us), but political organisations would be making an unpardonable error if they concluded that there is no point in elections. In the first place, they are important because they quite faithfully reflect each party's impact and influence, providing a pretty accurate graphic image (including abstentions) of the level and nature of the populations political consciousness.

This political thermometer marked a general defeat for Hollande and his government and, in passing, wiped out all the myth-making that had gone before about municipal elections being all about strictly local issues: all those who in 2012 had expected this government to protect them against the attacks of capital, this time around voted against his party or abstained. That message is clear. In this sense the

bourgeois way the newspaper Le Monde explains what this vote means is deliberately misleading. They write that Holland is now paying the bill for a poor start to his tenure because it was not sustained by a clear and clearly-articulated project. (Editorial on 1 April 2014). But the obviously bourgeois nature of his project was exactly what working people did understand and voted against. Nevertheless, in its usual convoluted way, the newspaper does express the bourgeoisie's innermost concerns and its insistence that greater determination should be shown in serving that class. Their complaint expresses these requirements and their preferred response, which is to take matters directly in hand via their own traditional parties. In this they are encouraged by Hollande's own bourgeois proclivities. That explains the significance of the heightened profile of the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP), the Union of Democrats and Independents (UDI) and the Democratic Movement (MoDem), parties which express the bourgeoisie's desire to press ahead with the destruction of social gains. We can be quite sure that Hollande will do everything he can to satisfy these expectations and will (if possible) become even more hostile to what working people want.

### **The strength of the fascists (barely) conceals their bourgeoisie character**

The considerable advance made by the National Front (FN) is almost entirely due to its demagogic propaganda which appears to defend the interests of workers and working people. But watch out! This tactic of appearing to defend working people is a well-established and well-known trick used by all extreme-right parties. In the 1920s Hitler developed the same stratagem, presenting himself as a defender of working people. He went so far as to call his party socialist, merely adding the adjective national. As for Mussolini, he came straight out of the Italian Socialist Party. As with all fascists, social demagoguery was their most important weapon, and this is what the

National Front has picked up on. But how demagogic this political line is, is revealed clearly by the fact that it does not attack the whole bourgeoisie and its social system. It only sets its sights on one of its political lines, the one currently in the foreground: Europe. It advocates a different line, i.e. the withdrawal into nationalism represented by the other, minority, section of the European bourgeoisie. So the FN attacks the bourgeoisie majority (European) policy, but not the bourgeoisie as a class which exploits other classes, nor its capitalist system. Far from it, it vigorously attacks immigrant workers, in other words the majority of the working class, and carries on alarmingly about workers gains, denouncing various benefits. It has derived great advantages not just from this lying demagogy, which continues to conceal its avowedly bourgeois nature, but also the fact that no single party has yet unmasked it as a bourgeois party. Normally, criticisms merely affect its anti-European stance and its racist and nationalist phobias, without touching on the bourgeois basis on which they grow like excrescences.

### **Why is the Left Front marking time?**

Elections are also an opportunity for all those united around shared political aims to rally together so as to further extend their ranks. This is particularly true of all those who wish, on the basis of a programme, to make a step forward towards freeing working people from the yoke of the capitalist system. So the elections offered the Left Front a chance to develop. So how to explain that, despite the terrible crisis of capitalism and the fact that workers rejected this society, the Left Front did not just fall a long way back from its spectacular results in the presidential elections, but was clearly overtaken by all bourgeois parties, including the FN and the UMP?

This absurd situation is a consequence of the Left Fronts political ambiguity. While it makes it clear that it thoroughly opposes the French and European bourgeoisies recent

austerity policies, it does not come out clearly against the capitalist system as such. It stays vague and enigmatic on this cardinal point which really does require some straight talking. This obscurity is revealed in the lack of a clearly working-class programme directed against capitalism as the social system at the root of all austerity. This lack of a programme and the fact they are locked into the normal bourgeois election framework have condemned them to limp along far behind the others. In short, their position does not measure up to the situation. How can you expect the Left Front to unmask the National Front as a bourgeois party if they equivocate over their own objectives? The municipal elections show that, under these conditions, the Left Front is condemned to mark time while the National Front has made considerable progress, including among discontented workers.

So the main lesson of the elections is obvious. They show ever more clearly that, instead of looking for scapegoats, the main task facing our Left Front is to make an objective assessment of its activity as a whole, above all its political programme,

Balazs Nagy, April 2014

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## **New Valls government: A government of anti-working class struggle**

By *Balazs Nagy*, April 2014

The recent local government elections and the formation of a

new government are a good opportunity, indeed a direct incentive, to say more about the mean, twisted and nasty way the Hollande team running the country think. Their politico-social reasoning is very simple, not to say simplistic. It is what you might call classical social-democratic thinking of a kind well-known over the last hundred years or more.

### **Resolute defenders of decadent capitalism**

The main thing that really marks these people out, among all those who claim to be on the side of working people, is that they present capitalism as an eternal system whose existence you just have to accept. So according to this disgrace to the name of socialist, everything we do is necessarily limited and determined by the framework of capitalism and its general rules. But as a consolation to working people, according to this conception, the capitalist system can be put right, amended and improved, and our job is to contribute to that. This cheapskate philosophy which has long been selling the mission of liberating the working class for a mess of pottage still had some limited validity when, in return for this sell-out, the bourgeoisie was still able to concede various actual reforms. But imperialism is the period of capitalism's decline – something which social democrats obstinately deny – in which, because it is exhausted, this system is organically unable to concede the slightest reform.

Now the present crisis has brutally revealed that this decline has got to the point where not only have reforms become impossible for this moribund system, but in order to survive it needs to attack and destroy previous reforms. This need is what explains its general offensive against existing reforms and its intransigent determination to fight that right through to the end.

But social democrats are incorrigible; they have not abandoned their grotesque fantasies, but adapted them precisely to the many-faceted requirements of this offensive on the part of a

bourgeoisie with its back to the wall. For all Hollande's solemn oaths – and this sheds some light on the social democrats consummate duplicity – they then told us all the fibs about the need on the one hand to swell the coffers of international capital by paying back the debt, and on the other to help our own impoverished capitalist with yet more billions. Against all the evidence they still maintain the lie that thanks to this aid the grateful bourgeoisie will do everything it can to secure the well-being of working people. Even a few weeks ago Hollande was still handing out dozens of billions in line with this plan, but he and his ilk were the only ones (like all self-respecting social democrats) who still believed the incredible dream that in exchange the bourgeoisie would give unemployed people work. (Through these outrageous deceptions they hoped to justify making savings by drastically cutting expenditure on health, education, all welfare benefits, wages, right to a job and so forth, to the point of threatening their very existence.) Alongside this savage demolition of genuine previous reforms – and to show that they are true reformists carrying out actual reforms – they have flooded the country with a wave of so-called societal reforms – at the margins of and even outside of social and economic life – such as same-sex marriage, electrical cars and so forth. The main function of these pretend reforms has invariably been to distract attention from the activity of destroying previous reforms.

The local government elections brought a stinging defeat to those who, in their arrogant and pretentious duplicity, thought that working people had swallowed this hogwash hook, line and sinker. They were sincerely and profoundly surprised when they saw the results. But to go from there to imagining that Hollande and co would revise their policies and adapt them to what working people want would be an absurd illusion. Far from it!

**A build-up of losses and other miseries threaten workers.**

The new government is not just a body committed carrying on Hollande and co.s bourgeois policy of robbing working people. In view of the preceding governments alleged dawdling in getting on with the job and also the bourgeoisies growing appetite, not to say bulimia, it is going to toughen up considerably. After 26 March, the employers body Medef trumpeted: A more ambitious trajectory than the 50 billion cut already announced is now absolutely imperative, (Le Monde, 30-31 March 2014). Then the headline on the same newspapers editorial of 1 April spelled out what the government has to do: Hold course! No wobbling, get on with it! And then Hollande's road map made it clear: The only responsible outcome is to set afoot and then roll out reforms aiming at securing an economic recovery. We all know the terrible reality hiding behind these anodyne words. The self-proclaimed leaders of the bourgeoisie in Brussels have also jumped at the chance to insist on greater rigour from the French government. And the commercial treaty being prepared between Europe and the US has up its sleeve further blows which will make any hopes of an economic recovery by France, already pretty well compromised, even more precarious.

Hollande reacted swiftly, obeying not indeed the wishes of the disappointed voters but the requirements of his real, bourgeois, bosses. He quickly established a new government team tightly organised around his closest social-democratic partners. His new prime minister, Valls, is ready-made to epitomise it, with his even more pronounced right-wing political orientation and aggressive character. It is no accident that he has long wanted to rid his party's name of the adjective socialist. So right from the start this team presents itself as an advanced detachment of a bourgeois attack formation. The odd reassuring and soothing phrase where required do not alter this truth. We shall have occasion later on to comment in greater detail on this new governments anti-worker offensive, the first elements of which, aiming to dismantle the social security system, we have just seen.

There certainly is a change, not to say a turn. Here is an end to the procrastination and shilly-shallying which, however much they suit Hollande's innate weakness, have become intolerable to the bourgeoisie and seem contrary to the nature of the new government. The presence of people with a left aura like Hamon and Montebourg has nothing to do with any real left. Much more, it signifies the end of equivocation or misunderstanding surrounding these careerists reputations. Indeed, if there is a real left in this party, apart from the usual fake-left loud-mouths like Lienemann and co., now would be the time to say so in opposition to the deployment of definite measures and attacks against workers gains. Above all, now is the time for all organisations who speak and act in workers interests to rally round the Left Front to prepare together a broad united front of all working people against the redoubled attacks by capital and its new government.

Balazs Nagy, April 2014

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## **Euro-election results reveal signs of Political turmoil in Europe**

By ***Bob Archer***

Politicians and the media talked a great deal about earthquakes as the results of last months elections to the European parliament were published. This was especially true in France and the UK, where the established parties were beaten at the polls by the Front National (FN) and the UK Independence Party respectively.

Failing to assuage voters anger could mean the erosion, if not the destruction of the union in a matter of years, said veteran Austrian journalist Erhard Stackl, writing in The New York Times International Weekly. In some countries, the vote against an integrated Europe was profound.

He consoled himself with the observation that nevertheless two-thirds of the votes were cast for pro-European parties. And in Germany, the economic powerhouse of the 28-nation bloc, Chancellor Merkel and her allies still command a comfortable majority.

Smarting under a series of lost seats in the European parliament, many established bourgeois parties needed all the consolation on offer.

Actually integrating and developing a unified economic unit in Europe is a historic necessity. How urgent it is has been adequately demonstrated by two terrible world wars centring on the continent.

The simple fact that the bourgeoisie finds it profoundly difficult to carry out this fundamental task is striking proof of how deep the crisis of capitalism is.

But their brainwashing machine quickly springs into action to distract attention from this problem to a series of real or imaginary surrogates:

There are three main reasons for the voters anger, Herr Stackl continues: dissatisfaction with political leaders, who are seen as uncaring and arrogant; frustration because of the slow economic recovery; and the growing fear of foreigners. Encouraged by demagogues, citizens of the well-to-do countries are blaming immigrants from poorer countries for many of their woes.

All established political parties from conservatives to social democrats speak and act on behalf of the capitalist class. They work might and main to remove all the social gains working people have made in previous decades and centuries. This includes all the so-called socialist parties, whether PASOC in Greece, the SPD in Germany, the Parti Socialiste in France or Labour in the UK, who all chant in unison that the debt ? which is really a tax levied by bankers via national state fiscal systems on working people all around the world ? has to be paid down, and that in order to do so, government spending on all social services, state education and health

provision, housing and welfare and all the rest has to be cut, and whatever fragments remain, privatised.

It is not the personal qualities of politicians which is the question here, but their attachment to the needs of a particular class, the bourgeoisie. Whether or not people are conscious of it, their anger towards these politicians is caused by a series of attacks on working people on behalf of this bourgeois class.

The slow economic recovery is caused by the global depth of the crisis of capitalism and, indeed, by what the bourgeoisie does in order to overcome it, for example cutting the living standards of swathes of working people across the continent, attacking benefits and wage levels, and so forth.

The growing fear of foreigners really is not just encouraged but fanned into flame by demagogues.

But, besides the vile gutter press which has carried out a sustained campaign of vilifying and scapegoating migrants, those demagogues also include significant forces in parties as respectable as the UK Labour Party. People who cannot recognise and fight their real enemy, concealed within a fog of business deals and obscure financial transactions, are incited to turn on their neighbours because of some imagined ethnic, national or religious difference. They are taught by these demagogues to judge their fellow working people by such standards and to blame them for a crisis they have not created.

Many commentators lump the FN and UKIP together with radical socialist parties like Syriza in Greece, Podemos in Spain and others. This is sowing deliberate confusion. The FN and UKIP deliberately seek a turn back into national economic isolation from the rest of the continent while whipping up backward chauvinism. Syriza and the others are a very different matter, and represent an attempt to resurrect political organisation among working people.

There are indeed some forces on the left which follow UKIP and the FN in denouncing European unity and migration, groups such as the Communist Party of Britain's NO2EU campaign in the UK, but in fact anybody who agreed with these bourgeois politics were always mainly going to vote for an openly right-wing grouping anyway.

Indeed, the media also played a role in this, completely

ignoring the left anti-EU candidates but adoringly splashing pictures of Nigel Farage and Marine Le Pen at every opportunity across front pages and the TV screen.

The subsequent media rhetoric about earthquakes hides the odd fact that most of these right-wing parties did less well in these elections than they have previously. The Dutch Party for Freedom of Geert Wilders saw their share of the vote tumble from an earlier prediction of 20% to a mere 13.3%. The Finns Party (True Finns) saw similar shrinkage in their vote. In recent Hungarian elections, Jobbik won 20% of the vote, but in the Euro-elections they claim as a break-through, they only achieved 15%.

However, the outcome of the 2014 European elections strengthen and embolden some of the most reactionary forces across Europe. With resistance by working people to cuts and austerity continuing across the continent, often inchoate as is it, such forces will soon be unleashed to impose the bourgeois attacks on working people.

More than ever, a step forward in building a workers movement across the continent for a Europe of working people is essential. The answer to fascism does not lie in relying upon the bourgeoisie to sustain democratic methods when it is wracked by crisis. It lies in mobilising working people to fight for the needs of their class.

But this must involve overcoming the damage to working class organisation and consciousness brought about by the bourgeois attacks, the collapse of the USSR and its satellites and the degeneration of socialist and communist movements.

The articles by [Balazs Nagy](#) in the [Wirfi Journal No.5 June 2014](#) deal with all these issues through the prism of the French municipal elections and preparations for the recent Euro-elections. They provide the essential basis for grasping the current political situation and acting upon it.

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# **Down with the bourgeois politics of the Front National! Against reactionary, nationalist fascism!**

By *Balazs Nagy*, May 2014

The forthcoming European elections will no doubt produce unprecedented advances by the French Front National (FN). It gained considerable strength by its spectacular advances in the recent municipal elections, which have clearly given it a head-start in the European elections. So a critical examination of its programme, in particular in relation to Europe, is not only vital in itself but allows us to clarify what the essential problems for Europe are. It also allows to look at all the other parties European policies.

Now, to decode what the FN's orientation towards Europe is and what it means, we must first of all describe its national policy. We must do this not on the basis of that party's own deceptive slogans or what other people say about it, but on the firm basis of the only objective criterion for political evaluation, i.e. its class character.

What is the Front National's real class character?

Actually, we need to establish clearly what the FN's social basis is and indicate unequivocally which class's interests are expressed in its programme and activities. This is the fundamental question which politicians and commentators either evade or completely muddle up, but it is the most important one.

There are, of course, some vague and hesitant answers which describe the Front National as a petit-bourgeois party, or one

that speaks on behalf of layers of de-classed workers. And it is true that in the FN's various shenanigans you will see out-and-out, provocative and panicked members of the petit-bourgeoisie as well as disorientated and desperate working people who follow this party. A large number of bourgeois propagandists also call this a populist party, alluding to its social demagoguery. But the only concrete content of this description is simply the bourgeoisie's familiar contempt for anything in the slightest way connected with the people.

All these descriptions are superficial. The adjective populist is so devoid of meaning that brain-dead journalists, in deference to the futile and inconsistent great minds they follow, apply it not just to the FN, but to Melanchon's Left Party (Parti de Gauche) too! What do they care that the class nature and objectives of these two parties are radically opposed, or that by acting in this way they are depriving themselves of an investigative method that actually has some validity.

But it is also superficial to view the FN as a petit-bourgeois party, even if there is an element of truth in it. It is true that the Front National is petit bourgeois in its composition, like similar bodies all over Europe. That was also true in the past of Hitler's and Mussolini's parties, and the rest of them, before they seized power. This widely-held opinion arises from immediate impressions based on superficial features of these parties, which various cohorts of petit-bourgeois do flock to join. It goes no further than the social composition of these parties, and completely neglects to describe their clearly and explicitly bourgeois programme.

The FN's bourgeois nature is clearly underlined by the party's programme and – as we shall see in detail later on – by what it actually does. But so-called classical bourgeois and social-democratic politicians and all their spokesmen make all that disappear as if by magic. This blindness is the intellectual expression of the class and social stratum to which they belong, and they also display it towards all past fascist movements (from Hitler and Mussolini to Franco and

Salazar).

This conception, which camouflages the social nature of fascist parties behind their social composition, was taken up and amplified by Stalinists in the 1930s and pressed into service for their Popular Front policies to rescue bourgeois society. Certainly the tenacious persistence of this superficial point of view right up to the present owes a lot to the still considerable influence of Stalinist ideology, which continues to poison minds at large, long after its progenitors power collapsed. As for the kinship between the FN and past (and present) fascist parties, it can be confirmed to the extent that their specific – and shared – bourgeois character is clearly understood. To check this we need first to make a brief detour into the past.

### **Past lessons help us to understand the present**

What we need, to help us orientate ourselves correctly, is a theoretical elucidation of the historic experience of those years, in particular Trotsky's Marxist explanation, which remains totally valid today. Against all the general, botched and inconsistent characterisations one encounters today, he alone provided a serious analysis of fascism based on the class struggles and movements in capitalist society in its period of decline. Of all the many writing he devoted to this subject, let us pick his study: What Next? Vital Questions for the German Proletariat (1932), which I strongly recommend to all activists.

In it, Trotsky notes that in the period of its imperialist decline, capital is able to stay in power only through the entire support of either social democracy or fascism. And if the strength of the proletariat is paralysed by the lack of its own political organisation or the inability of its leadership to march towards the seizure of power, these auxiliary arms of capital will grow stronger. But the inevitable accentuation of the general crisis of capitalism and its growing exhaustion sap and undermine the traditional

pedestals upon which social-democratic activity is based: reforms and parliamentary democracy. The exacerbation and prolongation of the general crisis thus abolish the foundations upon which social-democracy rests (reforms) and alters the framework within which it operates (parliamentary democracy). So social democracy grows noticeably weaker while the fascists, with their unbridled social demagogy, grow stronger.

Only a thin membrane today separates France – or indeed the majority of European countries – from a similar situation. To be able to re-establish capitalism's former equilibrium and check the decline that threatens it, the bourgeoisie urgently needs not just to completely demolish the gains the proletariat made previously, but also to smash (or completely domesticate) its organisations. At the moment, they reckon that they can do that without recourse to the direct terror of fascism. They have already appreciably weakened democracy in an authoritarian and Bonapartist direction both within each country and at a European level. They have also succeeded in destroying a considerable mass of social rights and advantages, and all without any large-scale social shocks. Even if they still have a long way to go, all the signs are that they will be able to continue along the same lines. So you can sum it up like this: The so-called democratic rule of the bourgeoisie, profoundly corrupted by the virus of bonapartist authoritarianism, has already shown much more muscle in imposing tough decisions, while at the same time that class is still afraid of the kind of leap into the unknown involved in going over openly to fascism, the memory of which is still painfully alive. It prefers to stick with the social democrats who anyway seem determined enough to destroy social gains and rights and working class organisations (or at least severely discipline them). Above all, they are reassured by the remarkable weakness and torpor of the workers organisations, the virtual absence of a vigorous response by the proletariat. So everything encourages them to continue as they did in the past.

But despite all that, the crisis has grown more severe and instability has increased. Bourgeois voices are raised demanding a further and more decisive turn, pressing ahead to restore capitalism's health. The European Commission, the French employers organisation, Medef, and other members of the bourgeoisie show no gratitude to Hollande for services rendered but grow yet more demanding and openly arrogant. Alongside this, the fascists' strength and influence spread and they prepare to take power. Under these conditions the bourgeois nature of Front National stands out increasingly and its kinship with fascism becomes obvious.

**An aggressive bourgeois party custom-built to save moribund capital at any price.**

The class character of the Front National's programme leaves no room for doubt. It is flagrantly bourgeois. At the same time the FN takes care not to place too much emphasis on its total open support for capitalism, so as not to compromise the social posture it has usurped. However, its programme and the corresponding propaganda nowhere put in question capitalism as such as a well-defined social and economic system. Its criticisms are aimed not at the system itself but solely at its current policies, against which it advocates the application of different policies of the same capitalist system.

So of course it carefully avoids seeking to overthrow capitalism or agitating for this. Consequently it is deliberately opposed to the social revolution and looks forward to coming in power in accordance with all the rules and customs of bourgeois parliamentary politics, even if it would not hesitate to shoulder them aside should the need arise. But, like all other fascist formations past and present, they won't lay a finger on the sacrosanct private ownership of capital.

Now unlike the traditional bourgeois parties and their social democrat partners and rivals, the FN and its like do not rest

content merely to present a different programme. These parties base theirs on a virulent and provocative social and political criticism of economic, social and cultural defects, not as something inherent to the capitalist system, but as the direct consequences of alleged corruption of national space and its invasion by various ethnicities and nationalities.

This is where the fascist nature of the Front National and its ilk right across Europe emerges clearly and unequivocally. Sociological and political criteria are replaced by nationalist and racist phrase-mongering. Hitler and his supporters found an explanation for the social sufferings of the masses in an imaginary Jewish plot. We know what atrocities this vile anti-Semitism led to. At present the Front National focuses its attacks on Arab-origin French workers and working people and on refugees. But of course they have merely adapted the self-same genocidal propensities to demographic and political changes and are keen to shrug off the highly-injurious association with the still vivid memories of the death camps. But as long as capitalism continues and tries to halt its decline, anti-Semitism and its fascist thugs will also remain active.

Now this nationalism and racism do not emerge – and never did historically – as excessive national sentiment somehow outside of or above classes. As they always did, they form the foundations of a policy and propaganda with a clearly-defined class basis. Its violent anti-Arab attacks are concentrated on and aimed against the most numerous and most vulnerable section of the French working class and working people, which is those of Arab origin and/or identity. But curiously they spare rich emir parasites and, as if by magic, turn into fascinated admiration when it comes to Saudi Arabia and the Emirates, these great rentier parasites of world capitalism. (Ingrained anti-Arabism on the part of a few fanatical mystics does not alter this fundamental political fact).

This bourgeois-fascist lineage or genealogy on the part of Front National is entirely confirmed by its real attitude to so-called austerity policies. It castigates them in general

and as a whole as mistaken and useless, since in their view all problems would be solved if only all foreigners were expelled, but in reality it does not engage in the slightest struggle against the anti-working class measures involved. One would look in vain for any plan or real struggle by the FN against the constant pension cuts, the systematic erosion of rights at work, or unemployment. On the other hand, it is well known that it was really the FN who thought of slapping the disgusting and contemptuous label welfare dependents on social welfare recipients, especially the unemployed, and call for payments to be stopped. If they have for now shut up on this typically ignoble fascist demand, it is because the fascist contamination is so strong that other bodies are doing their work for them (Like Sarkozy through his fascist adviser Buisson, and after him the Socialist Party interior minister Valls against Roma, or now the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) MP Wauquiez on welfare dependency)

### **The programme of national isolation is a fascist policy**

The fascist character of the Front Nationals bourgeois programme emerges most brutally in relation to Europe and its future. To strip it down, we need first to cast a brief glance at the bourgeoisies own orientation on Europe.

Painfully, and at the cost of two world wars involving massive destruction, this bourgeoisie, or rather its dominant faction, has arrived at a significant pragmatic conclusion: that the powerful contradiction between the forces of production, which have become European (and even global), and the strict maintenance of national divisions, is one of the causes of capitalist decline and thus a permanent source of war; that even this massive destruction, despite an unheard-of level of devastation, has done nothing to stop this decline but only slowed and prolonged it, all the while growing in extent and intensity. It was this empirical understanding which forced the bourgeoisie to undertake among other things the unification of Europe under the iron rod of its larger

monopolies.

Now the whole undertaking of building Europe is completely impossible for the bourgeoisie, whose birth was linked to and completely bound up with the birth of nation states. For the same reason, the death of these nation states will for sure only come over the corpse of the bourgeoisie. Events in recent years completely confirm this truth. The more the bourgeoisie has engaged on the road to its version of European unity, the more it has stoked up its crisis, the more it has weakened itself and torn itself apart. Its very first hesitant and shaky steps towards its alleged European unification already increased the general destruction at every level and increased many-fold the difficulties all working people have suffered. Above all and despite these unprecedented ravages, difficulties of every kind continued to grow, the class struggle has intensified, doubts persist and become widespread – and the death agony of capitalism worsens.

The Front National certainly picks up in a very lively way on what is badly wrong in the traditional bourgeoisies (and its social democratic allies) attitude to Europe, not to correct it, but to denounce European re-unification as an unsuitable, not to say harmful, approach to resolving the general crisis of the system. Against it they advocate the abolition of the Euro and other attributes of unification and a frank return to national sovereignty as we used to know it.

But such a jump backwards into the past is nowadays impossible; it would create immense upheavals which could quite possibly throw humanity a long way back. How damaging that would be was proved by the atrocities of war as long ago as 1914 and confirmed by the even worse atrocities between 1939 and 1945. Nowadays the European jigsaw of nation states existing separately from each other as independent entities is no more than an historic relic based on differences of language and culture. When we look at the material basis of life, we see economies really intertwined, an organic linking or fusion between the economic products of the various countries which has far outgrown any kind of self-contained

national economies existing in parallel and lends them an increasingly integrated character at the European and even international level. Even if this unification is being done in a capitalist way, i.e. by cruelly grinding away involving material destruction, suffering on the part of millions, and above all glaring imperfections and inadequacies, it is concretely being done and there is no possible way to turn the clock back that does not involve general chaos.

This is because what is at stake here is the historic development of the socialisation of production on a grand scale, something that even the bourgeoisie has continually had to adapt to, albeit in its own capitalist way, in order to mitigate the growing and murderous contradiction between this process and the private character of ownership. The absurd, rickety, incomplete character of their European turn faithfully reflects their fear and inability to see things through to the end, and then on top of that they had to adjust to the international socialisation that has been (wrongly) described as globalisation. Their grotesque attempts to mitigate the threats of serious instability that arise in the capitalist system from this growing international socialisation by establishing official but ramshackle European, American, Asian etc. regional groupings and then the G20 are testimony to how potent this socialisation process is. These bourgeois reactions to the challenges posed by the socialisation of the world (and European) economy cannot but be timid and incomplete, because not only do they rest on the basis and framework of capitalism, they also aspire to consolidate the system. But instead of mitigating the sources of disequilibrium and instability, they increase them and sharpen the contradictions even more. And so the bourgeoisies European adventure has considerably increased imbalances across the continent, increased economic instability and further deepened the contradictions between the various countries in the continent. The persistent isolation which has greeted French intervention in Africa (Mali and Central African Republic), then the paralysing cacophony of

contradictory interests over Ukraine and Putins policies express this natural inability to achieve real European unity.

### **For a workers programme for Europe!**

The conclusion is obvious: All criticisms of the Front National which do not expose its bourgeois character badly miss the essential point. Obviously none of the bodies such as the (Conservative) UMP, the Socialist Party (PS), etc., can do that, so their criticisms of this dangerous rival are reduced to angry shouting of a generally moral order. Their hands are particularly tied in this respect in that they all on occasion draw from the same nauseating bourgeois political arsenal as the Front National without a second thought. Their policies towards Roma and other refugees illustrate this perfectly. At a European level they are compelled to defend their own anti-working class machinery in servile and ingratiating terms against the spectre of the aggressive FN nation-state.

In fact, expecting any political organisation that is not itself resolutely opposed to the bourgeoisie to come up with a class critique of the Front National is really like trying to square the circle; its literally impossible! And the absence of such a fundamental critique on the part of organisations which nevertheless put themselves forward as opposing the capitalist system as a whole reveals how seriously they lack any such ambition.

But a few additional comments are required on the European policy of the Left Party (Parti de Gauche), who do aspire to represent working people and so deserve a closer examination. For all our political sympathy for this organisation, or rather, precisely because of the solidarity we feel towards it, we are obliged to repeat a criticism we already made during the French municipal elections: It quite clearly does not have a working-class programme. It didn't have one during the previous elections and the lack is possibly even more glaring in relation to Europe.

Of course we do know this party's criticisms of the

bourgeoisies current European monstrosity and its austerity policies. We agree with them. But it is essential to recall that even the harshest, severest and most extensive criticisms workers pour out on this Europe do not add up to a political programme. If they themselves were enough to create such a programme, you would not need a political party. On the other hand we are undergoing the terrible effects of the Europe imposed by the PS, UMP and their allies. We also know that in this area the Front National wants a return to nation-states. These are the two orientations available to the bourgeoisie. But what, concretely, does the Left Party want? In the absence of a clear and direct answer, one can only speculate.

The party's documents talk about the need to reject Europe as it is so as to open the way to put it right socially, economically and ecologically. It also demands that Europe should be re-founded on social, ecological, democratic and peaceful foundations and also wants a new model of development in Europe. It declares it wants to put an end to the Europe of finance, asserting the need to break with productivism: set up a Europe-wide ecological planning system.

The way these desires are formulated suffers from a dreadful lack of precision, expresses unforgivable naivety and at times betrays crass ignorance. It very clearly shows that instead of an exact and precise political programme, the Left Party presents a fairly confused jumble of vague aspirations and scrambled and indistinct hopes and desires. In any case, the one priority that does stand out clearly in this wish list is to leave the capitalist structure of economy and society fundamentally unchanged, since all this party wants to do is at most alter (or re-found) it in the sense of relegating finance to a subordinate position and reorganising the economy according to ecological doctrine.

In doing so, this list abandons all the tried and tested methods of working peoples struggles such as putting social demands in the foreground and the alliance with trade union struggles. It replaces them with the cheap and tacky ideology of ecology, whose main function is to absolve the capitalist

system of its innate responsibility for destroying nature and to re-direct this accusation against people in general.

Now all these specific wishes are entirely compatible with preserving the continued existence of capitalism. They do not at all demand that it should be destroyed, but merely that it should be corrected and improved. (Clearly this party's leaders do not realise that even some of these innocent wishes are in complete contradiction with capitalism as it really is. And in that case capitalism will either tolerate these garrulous but basically inoffensive charlatans or it will confront them brutally because its crisis is getting more serious. As always happened throughout history, when that occurs, the great majority of these nave quacks will choose capitulation while a tiny minority will decide to fight but, unprepared and overtaken by events, will go down to certain defeat.)

But a workers programme takes an entirely different route: It calls things by their proper name. So it starts resolutely and publicly from how flagrantly and obviously bankrupt capitalism is when it comes to providing the slightest solution to or improvement in the day-to-day difficulties working people in Europe face. The future capitalism holds for them is getting gloomier and less secure, and the system itself cannot accurately predict even the main lines of where it is going. It will not find refuge in any one of its long-past variants: certainly not its old, bankrupt, democratic version and even less whatever it can lash together in terms of the nation-state. Such a programme would clearly enunciate the need to abolish this bankrupt capitalism and replace its pseudo-Europe with the goal of a United Workers (or Socialist) States of Europe, the only road to any real level of continental economic and social integration. We call on all worker-activists and their political organisations, especially the ones in Left Front, to adopt that sort of programme.

It is easy to see that such a programme could not be achieved all in one go, but needs to be prepared and facilitated by a whole series of obvious immediate demands which, as

transitional demands, would lead to the inevitable conclusion that such a programme is needed. Besides providing a framework activists to mobilise, it is essential that, to fulfil the requirements of a genuine workers programme in leading us to socialism (actual break with capitalism, real class independence and living working-class internationalism), such a programme should contain:

1. Joint planning at a European level of the activity of all political formations really fighting for a working peoples programme for Europe, and standing international co-ordination between them.

2. It is important to state the objective of a struggle for a Working Peoples Europe, as the anti-chamber to the Workers United States, in opposition not only to the current bankers Europe but also the fascists goal of nation-states.

Several partial demands can be condensed into this one:

- a. It implies the struggle to unify legislation right across Europe which embodies social advantages and gains on the basis of the most favourable (minimum wage, pensions, social security, etc.).

- b. It involves sustained activity in relation to and alongside the trade unions with a view to extending co-operation to organise this struggle.

3. The demand to cancel the states immense debts should be prominent in the programme. It is through the reimbursement of these debts and the interest that lenders (banks etc.) regularly siphon off a significant portion of the surplus value produced in the debtor countries. On the other hand, the obligation to repay the debt is used as a pretext to cut and destroy social rights and gains. So debt and repayment constitute the main current source of extra profit and a vital lever for exploiting the working class and working people in Europe. To make it easier to understand and popularise this demand, we should co-operate with all movements calling for a public, independent examination and general audit of these debts.

4. Reducing the struggle against unemployment to the national

level is a return to past failed practices or at least represents a serious illusion now that the inter-dependence of the various countries of Europe is so far advanced and the unemployed form about 20 per cent of Europe's active population. This fact makes an active movement essential which challenges capitalisms claim to dominate and direct the economy. That is the demand for workers control of businesses threatened with closure and the establishment of a struggle for workers control to ban unemployment.

5. Finally, a real fight for genuine European democracy is vital against all the bourgeoisies despotic bodies and arrangements. A real general clean-out is needed to close them down and re-organise them (the European commissions and directorates and all bodies such as the European Central Bank, the European Parliament, etc.) to ensure that there exists a new set of European arrangements that function in a healthy way at the service of working people. The pre-condition for such a clean-out is preparing, convening and holding a European Constituent Assembly.

A workers programme of this kind puts to shame all the various schemes and horse-trading which preoccupy the leaders of the Left Front about what organisations are called and whose names is on the ballot paper as miserable squabbles of a cheap parliamentary politics unable to hide the absence of a workers programme worthy of the name. However, perhaps a pathetic result at the ballot box will shake these organisations centrist outlook and unleash a movement for their renewal. It is a hope to cling to.

*Balazs Nagy,*

May 2014

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# On tactics in the French municipal elections

How fragile the Left Front (Front de Gauche) still is has been shown by the municipal elections and the tactical disagreements between the two main participating organisations. We know that the Communist Party (PCF) has advocated – and arranged – local electoral alliances with the Socialist Party (PS) wherever some basis for an agreement made that possible. So they are going for an electoral bloc with the SP, not general and national, but arranged case-by-case as local opportunities permit. The Left Party (Parti de Gauche) on the other hand rejected even a local alliance with the PS from the outset on the basis that it was incompatible with the very justified criticisms the Left Front as a whole has made of the policies of the PS government.

This disagreement has baffled many workers, who expected the Left Front to present clear, united slogans. They feel handicapped by this – to say the least – difference of approach between the main forces in this coalition, which is why it is absolutely vital to examine this disagreement with a view to clarifying what it means and finding a way forward for working people.

## **What is the Left Front?**

We Marxists, we have to say, are not at all surprised by the ongoing disagreements at the heart of the Left Front. Yes, we believe that this front is the first fruits of a genuine attempt to re-build the revolutionary party of the working class, and we are totally part of, but we are still at the very beginning of this process. So, unlike comrades who see this as already the finished form of working class political representation, we think that the Left Front is only a first, promising sketch which has still got a long way to go to fulfil its real mission. It is not united; its class character

is still ill-defined; in its composition, Marxists rub shoulders with non-Marxists, consistent revolutionaries with non-revolutionaries, and so forth.

We still have a long way to go to achieve the revolutionary Marxist workers' party the working class and all working people need. The way may be longer or shorter, more or less painful and difficult and strewn with disagreements and crises, and the progress needed will consist in overcoming these in a positive way. We cannot anticipate everything that will happen along the way, but we can be quite certain that it will be punctuated with disagreements and crises, and what we are currently experiencing is the first manifestation of this.

In general, two exaggerated views of the character of the Left Front can quite often be found among activists clearly situated to the left of the PS – trade unionists, communists and ex-communists and various tendencies which claim adherence to this or that brand of Trotskyism, not to mention all kinds of anarchists. This is hardly surprising, given the present prohibition that has been placed upon Marxist thinking, which has been widely repudiated and suffered recurrent distortion and falsification. The first is to categorically reject the Left Front on the basis of an abstract formalism and professorial pedantry, which sees this re-groupment only as a non-Marxist formation and conglomerate of former social democrat or Stalinist survivors, a formation discredited by the compromised pasts of its various components from a really bygone age. This sectarianism is insensitive and indifferent to the specific forms taken by the powerful dynamics of working class resistance, under the constant attacks from capital at bay that plague it. This view is typical of the tradition of certain organisations claiming adherence to Trotskyism, such as the Lambertist POI (Parti ouvrier internationaliste), "Lutte Ouvrière" and a large part of the New Anti-Capitalist Party (Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste, NPA) and milieus they influence.

The other, opposite, exaggeration assumes that this Left Front – or one of its components – already is the ready-made, finished version of this party the working class so badly needs, which will start to function better as it grows (occasionally at the expense of the other protagonists). Sadly it seems to me the overwhelming majority of the participating organisations' leaders share this position with many of their members. One of the drawbacks of such a view is that it cannot grasp the way differences and misunderstandings blow up, however much they are to be expected in a movement that is actually still being built. It sees such things as aberrations disturbing and threatening the smooth functioning of the whole. Consequently, such disagreements provoke a rigid, paralysing blockage which freezes the contradictions and prevents a positive outcome.

Under these conditions, the division over the two different electoral tactics which has hit the Left Front reinforces and accentuates the organisation's overall weaknesses, one of which (there are others) is the evident inconsistency with which the two organisations each pursue their own tactical choices, as we shall see shortly. This, too, reveals that neither the Left Front nor any of its components is yet ready to be considered this new revolutionary party of the proletariat. We all hope it will succeed in making the necessary adjustments. A decisive step towards that goal consists precisely in passing the present test, positively clarifying the difference and overcoming it as a step forward in achieving greater revolutionary cohesion. And this is the solution to which we hope our thoughts and comments will contribute. The first of these is to define the significance of municipal elections in the current struggle and the role they could play.

### **Contradictions in an unprecedented situation**

The unremitting attacks on the part of exhausted, moribund capital; the fragility of the internal contradictions racking the bourgeoisie's classical political resources, including

above all the presence of the Socialist Party at the helm and managing the bourgeoisie's bankruptcy; the crushing weight of successive defeats and setbacks the workers' movement has suffered: all this confers on the current stage an exceptional specific character. This exceptional character leaves its stamp on events and movements, including the municipal elections. It is further accentuated by a growing tendency among working people to defend themselves vigorously while at the same time having difficulty picking their way forward through the lumber of bankrupt ideologies and organisations under the mantle of the workers' movement, surrounded as they are by deadly traps. But it is this, even subterranean, resistance which feeds and renews and reinforces their attempts to rebuild their fighting potential, above all their party. These are the specific features which determine the current situation and prevent us from considering the coming elections according to schemas and clichés we got used to over past decades.

That is why all views and conceptions that see these elections in the traditional way as a sort of joust between two parties in a tournament miss the essential point. They lose sight of the probable character of these elections as a moment expressing a certain shift or re-alignment of class forces that re-draws the political map of the country.

Even the bourgeois parties and Hollande's Socialist Party are afraid of such a possibility and do not know which Saints to pray to for intercession or how save themselves from the National Front (Front National, FN). They do not fear the Left Front because it is split – and that in itself is a serious warning sign. Unlike everyone else, we Marxists do not see these elections, in this situation, as the usual competition, but as a potential opportunity for the Left Front to make a big, extra, step forward towards becoming this new party of the working class. And in this the choice of tactics can play a bigger role than in a calmer, less tense, "normal" times.

## **On the respective content of the two tactics**

The Communist Party tactic, which sets its sights on an alliance with the socialists anywhere and everywhere they can, is undoubtedly closer both to the situation and its requirements. It finds backing along a whole wave of critical sources of resentment among socialist activists against government policies which feed various oppositions within this party. Moreover, it has already inspired a number of planned or actual local agreements which have actually had an impact on the government's arrangements. It could potentially be an effective way of driving a wedge between the government and a section of its party, opening the way to a broader oppositional realignment.

On the other hand, the main problem with the Left Party's position of rejecting any local alliances with socialist activists is that they see the Socialist Party as one united, homogenous bloc. Against all the evidence, they deny that there is any permanent friction and internal opposition in this party. So, instead of relying on that, they cement this explosively refractory whole together under the leadership of Hollande and co.

Whether or not the competing partners in the enterprise even realise it, differences over tactics also involve different conceptions of or approaches to how effective the Left Front actually is. The Left Front clearly derives its tactics from two profoundly mistaken assessments, both unacknowledged, but all the more deeply held for that.

On the one hand, it is assumed that the Left Front is more or less the fully-fledged and recognised new party of working people, ready to take power and needing only to grow numerically. Too bad if others continue to support other parties or vote for the Socialist Party, even without illusions. Despite popular belief, there are still a lot of them, and even more who turn their back on the SP and do not

necessarily go to the Left Front (or the Left Party), but at “best” simply abstain.

Not a million miles from this unrealistic view, on the other hand, the Left Party imagines it can achieve power by increasing its vote. But it is very hard to see that happening, even for a political formation which does not challenge the capitalist system itself and the measures it is taking to survive. But the orientation and basic line of march of the Left Front go clearly beyond this system. So the majority of its demands are incompatible with keeping the system going and even more with the present desperate attempts to maintain it. This relationship entails a major and permanent confrontation which means there has to be a serious investigation and study of the conditions for this conflict and how to wage it.

### **What do the lessons of history tell us?**

To get a clearer assessment, not just of how inadequate it is to plan a direct raid on power, but also of the many dangers that entails, we need to turn to the past of the Marxist workers’ movement, which provides abundant theoretical and practical experiences on this topic. (That is, assuming you really want to replace the power of the bourgeoisie rather than simply amend it.) Here we can only indicate some essential references, without developing the whole topic fully.

The Second Congress of Lenin’s Third International opened fire on sectarianism, that “infantile disorder of communism” and twin brother of opportunism. Then in 1923 the Third Congress broadened this struggle into a vigorous campaign against ultra-leftism, working out communist tactics for winning the majority of working people. In its “Theses on Tactics” it talked of the conviction that “(t)he theory of promoting Communism by propaganda and agitation alone ... has been proved utterly incorrect”. It goes on to insist that: “Even the

smallest Parties should not limit themselves to propaganda and agitation. The Communists must act as the vanguard in every mass organisation. By putting forward a militant programme urging the proletariat to fight for its basic needs, they can show the backward and vacillating masses the path to revolution and demonstrate how all parties other than the Communists are against the working class. Only by leading the *concrete struggles* of the proletariat and by taking them forward will the Communists really be able to win the broad proletarian masses ...”  
([www.marxist.org/history/international/comintern/3rd-congress/tactics.htm](http://www.marxist.org/history/international/comintern/3rd-congress/tactics.htm))

Already the Third International explained the need to establish a whole “system of” partial “demands” in order to engage in this struggle, which was later developed by Trotsky in the famous Transitional Programme of the Fourth International. These Theses very clearly outlined the character of these “partial demands” which “... in their totality, challenge the power of the bourgeoisie, organise the proletariat and mark out the different stages of the struggle for its dictatorship. Even before the broad masses consciously understand the need for the dictatorship of the proletariat, they can respond to each of the individual demands.”

The majority of the Third International followed Lenin, who in many speeches and articles severely criticised the so-called “theory of the offensive” which several young communist parties had adopted. Lenin emphasised the central importance of preparing the seizure of power. In his speech to the Congress he criticised the Italian, Terracini, who “defended the theory of an offensive, pointing out ‘dynamic tendencies’ and the ‘transition from passivity to activity’,” which, said Lenin, “are all phrases the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries had used against us”. Later he added: “If it is said that we were victorious in Russia in spite of not having a big party, that only proves that those who say it have not understood the

Russian revolution and that they have absolutely no understanding of how to prepare for a revolution.”

Speaking of the need to win the masses, Lenin explained: “The concept of “masses” undergoes a change so that it implies the majority, and not simply a majority of the workers alone, but the majority of all the exploited. Any other kind of interpretation is impermissible for a revolutionary ... what is essential ... is not only the majority of the working class ... but also the majority of the working and exploited rural population”.

(<http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1921/jun/12.htm#s3>).

Then the Fourth Congress’s “Theses on the United Front” in 1921 rounded out this tactic, which had actually been prevalent from the very beginning of the Third International. They stated that “The Communist Parties of the world ... are now trying at every opportunity to achieve the broadest and fullest possible unity of these masses in practical activity.” They emphasised that the reformists “... will not fail to sell out ... the ... Communists and the revolutionary elements of the ... working class must still approach the reformists before the start of every mass strike, revolutionary demonstration or any other spontaneous mass action, asking them to support the workers’ initiative, and must systematically expose the reformists when they refuse to support the revolutionary struggle of the workers. This will prove the easiest way to win the masses of workers who are outside the Party.” (<http://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/4th-congress/united-front.htm>)

Contrary to popular belief, this proletarian united front policy is a general and permanent tactic, not just a policy applied from time to time in the face of dangers like, say, the threat of fascism. (Albeit that today in France such a threat, represented by the clear advances the Front National is making, is perfectly real). It is an integral part of the

arsenal of any workers' party worthy of the name at every point in its struggle to win over a majority of proletarians.

I already mentioned that in the 1930s Trotsky developed this tactic, among other things by elaborating these "partial demands" in the *Transitional Programme*. At the same time he advanced the united front tactic, particularly in the trade unions and in the socialist parties of the time.

But it is important to emphasise also the less well-known fact that about the same time the Italian Communist leader Antonio Gramsci, imprisoned in a fascist goal, largely contributed to developing this same tactical orientation. Of course the fact that he was in prison, which cut him off from all political activity, explains the more "philosophical" character of his studies and arguments, less linked to immediate practise and less concretised than Trotsky's. But what they thereby lose in political freshness, they gain in depth of generalisation. Be that as it may, Trotsky's and Gramsci's analyses support and complement each other in bringing out and explaining the tactics of the proletarian party.

In his *Prison Notebooks* Gramsci also took as his starting point the rich heritage of Lenin's International. Even before he was imprisoned, these same considerations led him to oppose the adventurist policy of the so-called "Third Period" of the Stalinist Third International through the famous "Lyons Theses" (1926) of the Italian Communist Party, based on these principles and clearly orientated towards the conquest of the masses against the adventurist ultra-left offensive of the Stalinist Comintern. In the years when he was writing the *Prison Notebooks*, he developed these views into a great theoretical whole dealing with the conquest of power. Without looking at the whole scope of this important theoretical elaboration, one can summarise its essence as follows.

Starting from Lenin's thoughts on the more difficult conditions for the seizure of power in highly-developed

western countries compared with backward countries such as Russia had been, Gramsci came to the conclusion that in the west the bourgeois state, supported and reinforced by a whole range of institutions and movements, is infinitely more robust than in less-developed countries such as Tsarist Russia. Consequently, instead of a quick, direct and offensive "war of movement" like the Russian Revolution, the western proletariat, in its struggle for power, needed to develop a whole tenacious and patient "war of position" to achieve a winning majority. As Gramsci wrote late in 1930: "It seems to me that Ilitch (Lenin) understood that a change was necessary from the war of manoeuvre applied victoriously in the East in 1917, to a war of position which was the only form possible in the West ... That is what the formula of the United Front seems to me to mean" (*Antonio Gramsci: Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. by Hoare and Nowell-Smith, London 2003, pp. 237-8).

(The impression this gives that the united front policy had not been applied in Russia is probably due to a lack of precision in Gramsci's formulation quoted, but does not correspond to his thought in general.)

This brief foray into the heritage of Lenin's Third International, as taken up and developed and re-fined by Trotsky and Gramsci when faced with the whole Stalinist degeneration, much discredits the ultra-leftism in which Stalinism frequently indulged. Even today a number of organisations tend to follow this bad tradition, popularised by Stalinist adventurism, rather than the traditions of Marxist theory and experience. Reading this, one could of course object that neither the Left Front as a whole nor its various separate organisations are Marxist parties inspired by Lenin's ideas, nor do they claim to be. And that is precisely why I started this article by talking about shortcomings and inadequacy when it comes to the development of the Left Front as the new, re-built workers' party.

## Let's assess recent experiences

In fact the Left Front, too, has sufficient experience of its own in this field to draw some valuable conclusions. Its involvement, and the vote it got, in the 2012 general election provide us with some useful lessons.

The spectacular results the Left Front had previously achieved in the presidential election testified to a rapid and unexpected development. This is very likely the reason why Jean-Luc Melancon decided to take on the Front National leader in Pas de Calais all on his own outside of any alliance, although that did look more like a personal challenge than a politically-considered attempt to win a valuable seat in the National Assembly. After all, the whole political atmosphere seemed to encourage a bold approach.

Sadly, the election results dashed these hopes, revealing that what had looked like confidence was only illusion. From a closer look at the voting figures, we can draw some conclusions which corroborate the theoretical and practical lessons of history.

The Socialist Party candidate, Philippe Kemel, won the seat with 50.11%, a mere 116 votes ahead of Marine Le Pen with 49.89%. So it was very close. Melancon could only manage third place with 21.48%, less than half of Le Pen's vote, escaping by a whisker a real political fiasco.

Since 40% of the voters abstained, that outcome really is terrible, but it does help us to get a clearer grasp of why the Left Front was routed. The very high level of abstentions shows that, while a great number of working people have lost confidence in the traditional left parties, they are still far from won over by the new Left Front formation. In any case, in Pas de Calais the Socialist Party was able to keep the support of clearly more of them than the Left Front could win over.

Since then, the only change in the situation is that

confidence in the Socialist Party is falling even faster, although that has still not nearly become the mass development the Left Front anticipated. The fact that this development is marking time has not escaped the attention of bourgeois journalists, to their unconcealed satisfaction. The problem is, this is not simply Schadenfreude arising from our opponents' habitual class instincts.

For example, one of the organisations which has joined the Left Front is the "United Left" ("Gauche Unitaire", made up of former members of the LCR), who have also criticised the Left Party's "go-it-alone" tactics. The party spokesperson, Christian Picquet, openly deplored them in an article evocatively entitled "For a united Left Front that can rally everybody together". Here he roundly states that: "... over the last 18 months the Left Front has not managed to extend the influence that it has gained ... it is even obliged to register a certain stagnation, expressing the problems we obviously have in coming across as a credible claimant to office". This stark assessment entirely coincides with our own observations above, including the fact that this "stagnation" started with the election cam-paign in Pas de Calais.

Before going on, we should remember, in relation to just that critical assessment by comrade Picquet, the argument most commonly-used against the PCF's tactics and consequently against our own conception of the need for local alliances with socialists. This is that it "would break up the positive dynamic of struggle" engendered by the Left Front in the Presidential elections. But this "argument" is based on an illusion. On the one hand it is clear that the "dynamic" referred to, if it still exists at all, has faded considerably, as the general election showed and various mass actions have con-firmed. On the other hand, it is precisely in order to lend new dynamism to the struggle that the Left Front needs to get out of the sort of ghetto into which, defying hopes and expectations, it has been shunted in the course of

these elections shunted. Undeniably, comrade Picquet's main concern is to make up for lost time by applying the correct tactics in the municipal elections.

He starts the article by saying: "I wish neither to abstain from the debate on what is at stake in the municipal elections nor to add fuel to a controversy in which *Le Monde* has seen ... a Left Front on the brink of imploding. But rather to develop the idea that it is a complicated political problem re-lated more to the considerable challenges involved in the period confronting us today than to any electoral calculations, which seem all the narrower for focusing on next March's municipal polls."

This is a prudent and quite timid way of declaring what is actually a criticism, even if comrade Picquet has carefully wrapped it up in a series of mental reservations as if oddly compelled to justify and excuse himself. But nobody gains from waffling about developing "the idea that it is a complicated political problem" instead of tackling the subject head-on. A criticism should be clear and pre-cise if it is going to be useful and effective.

Fortunately, comrade Picquet soon sheds his customary oblique way of talking. He calls on the Left Front to go beyond being a mere radical opposition to urgently set out "to win over sections of the left" and, in an evocative sub-heading, to "Make a move towards the rest of the left". Here he rightly states: "... there is now a majority on the left that can be won for a change of course, we should aim for the broadest possible re-groupment". One can only applaud this aim of re-grouping a broader left in the course of the municipal elections.

Laudable as this questioning of the tactic of standing in the elections alone is, however, it stops half way. For one thing because, like absolutely all the groups involved, it, too, is narrowly confined to the elections, and the opportunity to

grasp a lever to broaden support is seen only in that context. And for another because, for the same reason, correct as it is, it remains at the mere level of a simple good intention, even if we do see that comrade Picquet, too, feels the need for something more concrete than just a proposal for some vague broadening out. That is why he adds: "... unity cannot be separated from the bold project for transformation ... which is at the same time the condition for working class confidence that it can once again find its strength". Sadly, entirely valid as it is, this proposal is too hazy, general, unclear and laconic to be taken up.

### **Political wavering and inconsistent positions**

It must be said: the two main parties in the Left Front do not only define their tactics differently, they also apply them in inconsistent and contradictory ways. Although it looks like an opening to healthy forces in the PS, the political line of the Communist Party is not obviously any more than the usual kind of electoral manoeuvre. Instead of being an opening through which working people's struggle can flourish, it is locked even tighter into the strait-jacket of electoral games.

In negotiating these deals, the Communist Party seems to have abandoned any more radical demands and content itself with getting together with SP activists who had already decided to shift the government over certain things. In all this horse trading the Communist Party muffled its drums and behaved as the supplicants. It is characteristic that they held these talks in private, sometimes even behind the backs of the Left Party. All that explains the enormous restraint and exceptionally moderate character – in relation to what the government is doing – of these programmatic agreements.

But what completely devalued and debased these negotiations is that when they were carried out, the working people concerned were totally excluded, not allowed to participate and not even told. But any political agreements, and the negotiations

leading up to them, should be carried out in full view of working people and with their actual participation. The bureaucratic secrecy surrounding these talks reduced them to complicity between office-holders. It is a leaden heritage of Stalinism which the Communist Party obviously finds it hard to shake off.

Even if this is not the same, and not as bad, as the "Marchais-Mitterrand agreement" a few years ago, this way of turning to SP activists is a bureaucratic habit which compromises any opening to-wards these activists and makes a caricature of it. It is, then, hardly surprising that it offended their partners in the Left Party and strengthened comrade Melançon's obstinate determination to persist in his line that we saw earlier. (Since then, PCF tactics have even lost their only real justification, i.e. their determination to ally themselves only with local socialists more or less opposed to the government. Specifically, in Lyons they entered a rotten alliance with one of Hollande's worst supporters, the PS mayor, Collomb. This was despite several of their own candidates, faced with this right-wing mayor, linking up with the local Left Party. So it turns out that rather than adopting a correct tactic to break the SP line-up behind Hollande's policies, the bureaucratic local government forces in the CP are actually renewing their unprincipled tactic of allying with the SP government.)

But it would be an unforgivable mistake to imagine that some sort of rigid last-ditch stand involving an ultra-left blockage is a viable alternative to this lashed-together alliance the PCF has opted for, or its capitulation.

We have already said that the Left Party sees the Socialist Party as one uniform bloc, lost for all time. Their contempt extends to all party members, who are identified with the government, and goes so far as to refuse to even describe them as "socialists", instead superciliously (and childishly) calling them "solférénians" (The SP headquarters are in the

rue Solférino in Paris – Trs.)

But before even going into the obvious shortcomings of such a view, it is worth emphasising that a summary position of this sort presumes that the Left Party (or the Left Front) can double its influence and take power on its own, standing against all the activists who have stayed in other parties, including the SP. What few experiences we have contradict any such belief, even though it is this belief that has seized the minds of the party leadership. Despite its programme, which opposes austerity on behalf of working people, and despite its members' will and obstinate determination to convince workers that their programme is right, the Left Front is, as comrade Picquet explained, marking time. Having reached a certain threshold in its development, it is not managing to get over the critical point to achieve the greater dimension that is needed.

Obviously this has to do with a serious shortcoming in the methods chosen and carried out by the Left Party, particularly their desire to convince everybody by propaganda that their policy, and it alone, is the correct one. They are obviously convinced that all you have to do is present the truth, for it to be not only accepted but, above all, put into practice by working people. The party is particularly convinced of the effectiveness of this propagandism because comrade Melançon's oratorical talents really did facilitate their spectacular early progress.

But even the greatest charm or powers of seduction are no substitute for a right method and correct political behaviour. It is time to recognise superstitions for what they are and settle accounts with this magic of the spoken word, which still seems to mesmerise certain activists and their leaders. As we all know, at the last CGT (trade union confederation) congress, Comrade Melançon got more applause than the secretary, Thierry Lapaon. Nevertheless, it is the latter's proposals that count among CGT activists, not comrade

Melanchon's (more correct) ones. And while, at a meeting of the Parisian members of the PCF, more than 40% of those present voted for a united Left Front campaign and only 57% voted for alliances with the SP, people who use that as an argument against the electoral tactics of an opening to the SP members forget the practical realities. Of course this is a significant vote, as an indication, and it would be a mistake to under-estimate its scope. But an indication of sympathy, even a serious one, remains an indication, and cannot replace one policy with another. The PCF members who voted for an electoral alliance with Melanchon nevertheless unhesitatingly apply the opposite policy decided by their leadership. There was not even the shadow of a tendency crystallising inside the PCF, not to mention organised opposition. As for members leaving that party and joining the Left Party, not even comrade Melanchon dreams of that.

Of course the Left Party also feels how limited its forces are and it proved that by its attempts, contradicting its own policy of standing on its own, to find allies in the elections. It reached electoral agreements with ecologists in various towns. We have to call that flagrant political inconsistency, even before we say anything about its content or significance. On the one hand, what they did went against their tactic of standing on their own and their criticism of the PCF for doing just that, and, above all, on the other, while they criticised the CP for its alliance with one governing party, the Left Party made overtures to another party in the same government.

So the wheel turned full circle. You have to conclude that the Left Party not only stands on the same wheeler-dealing electoral terrain as all the other parties, but also hopes to win over a few ecologists this time using the accustomed method of sterile propagandism. But that method is even now showing itself to be ineffective. Eva Joly may have expressed sympathy with the Left Front and Noel Mamère may have broken

with the official ecologists, but both of them preserve a prudent distance from the Left Front. And actually – given their unshakable illusions in capitalism’s ability to fix itself, illusions on which the Left Party’s political arguments and programme clearly have little impact – we should be relieved.

### **Break with electoralism without falling into the traps**

In clarifying the problem we are dealing with, it is of the utmost importance to re-establish the original tradition of the revolutionary workers’ movement and of Marxism in relation to elections (local or national), betrayed, denied and blunted though that tradition has been. This past nevertheless teaches us that participating in and using elections is strictly subordinated to *direct* methods and organisations of workers’ and working peoples’ class struggle. Otherwise, any involvement in elections tends inevitably towards parliamentarism, i.e. adherence to bourgeois democracy through adapting to its institutions (including local government) and its rules. In any case, the organisations involved in the Left Front have plenty of time between now and the elections to overcome positively the difference which have arisen based on electoral calculation. But that can only happen if there is the will to go beyond the parliamentary (or municipal) horizon by organising workers’ struggles on the basis of a programme that is extra-parliamentary (or which goes beyond municipal politics properly speaking).

In what he writes, Comrade PICquet is quite right to seek a way forward along these lines, but it is going to take a lot more than his rather general guidance. Even his hasty attempt to sketch out three areas for doing this is botched because it leaves out some immediate and fundamental problems working people face. Apart from his call for a turn to the unions (which is left hanging in mid-air because its scope is limited to opposing the increase in VAT), his proposals for unity with various other left sectors and for “going beyond the way the

Left Front is run by a cartel" so as to "blend itself together" are far removed from working peoples' vital concerns and the problems they face.

In this connection there is of course no denying the positive fact that the Left Front also feels the need to shake off narrow, sordid parliamentarism and turn systematically to the working masses, calling on them to demonstrate for this of that real immediate aim or against things the bourgeoisie is doing. And so on 1 December last the two big parties in the Left Front got together to organise a national demonstration in Paris for a "fiscal revolution" and against the planned increase in VAT. Now. Choosing the tax system as a field of working people's struggles and the object of a confrontation with the government is obviously a huge blunder. Instead of hitting the enemy full-on, it misses its target – at best.

Taxation as such is hardly a central or particularly important concern for workers. It is important for the bourgeoisie, however, because they have a constant drive to cut the taxes they have to pay. In recent times in particular they have made it one of their war-horses in the struggle to do away with social gains. In reducing the taxes they pay, they also hope to solve the crisis in a way favourable to themselves by weakening and then abolishing the financial resources embodied in the social gains working people have made. The tax system also provides a useful weapon for easing the concentration and centralisation of capital through the elimination of the weakest and above all the destruction of petit-bourgeois intermediate classes. That is why lightening the tax burden, concretely, reducing various kinds of taxes, is a central demand of the petit bourgeoisie which, along with bourgeois layers ruined by competition, sees it as a life-belt.

Of course the working class and its organisations can and should offer support to downtrodden and threatened small and middle farmers, craftsmen and shop-keepers in their struggle against the overwhelming tax burden. Similarly the working

class wages an incessant struggle for an effective, progressive tax system as one of its transitional demands to defend real and relative wages and increase the burden on the bourgeoisie. But on the express and indispensable condition that these demands in relation to taxation are clearly subordinated to the objectives of the fundamental struggle against capital and not replace them with a "better" tax system.

This is because, despite the deliberate lies and widespread myths, you cannot have a fair and equi-table distribution of wealth in an unjust and unequal society. The only system of wealth distribution capitalism can provide is one in its own capitalist image, with a tax system as a corresponding means to achieving it. The more the system is cornered, as it is now, the more invasive, aggressive and one-sided its tax system becomes. What this means concretely is that one of the current aspects of the advanced death-agony of capitalism is the colossal, irreparable debt level of all states (to say nothing of other debtors). The preponderantly hawkish character of an omnipresent, arbitrary and unfair tax regime flows directly from this fatal scourge of capital, which uses its state tax system like a wounded beast desperately defending itself and its kin tooth and claw. So it would be a real mistake to separate a tyrannical, unjust and arbitrary tax regime from its immediate source and present it as if it was a sector independent of the socio-economic system as a whole and its current ills, and, moreover, as if it was its main determining feature. Whereas even this capitalism's own governments openly and cynically describe it as the price to pay for the monumental indebtedness of the state, and a means of paying it.

The general confusion in this field is what made possible the Force Ouvrière (FO) Union confederation's unfortunate mental lapse on 2 November in Brittany, when it entered an unnatural alliance with the region's bosses in the Quimper

demonstration. (We should note in passing that this perversion on the part of the anarchists leading this union does not mark any significant break with their past, since the anarchist who used to lead FO in the Loire Atlantique department, the late Alexandre Hébert, had already flirted with the local bourgeoisie under the benevolent gaze of his trade-union ally, Pierre Lambert.)

Comrade Mélanchon was a thousand times right to severely criticise this lapse on 2 November last, so it is all the more regrettable that he immediately fell into the same trap, although he did it as it were “independently”, without the disreputable allies. Worse, he jumped in and promptly lost his bearings. As if outbidding the others in some bizarre rivalry, he went much further than a simple protest to add his commitment (together with the Communist Party this time) to no less than a “fiscal revolution”. But no worker would feel that such an objective was any more than fanciful sermonising under capitalism. Under these conditions, all it does is tarnish the idea and practice of revolution, dragging this orientation down to the level of publicity for some detergent. Whereas the right thing to do would be to rise up not against the increasing tax burden, but against the immediate source of this apoplectic, cruel and violent expression of capital in its death agony – the gigantic and generalised debt.

But we know that the Left Front is deeply hostile to this scourge of indebtedness. It has already risen to demand it is repudiated, or rather, that an independent public enquiry is established to examine its legitimacy. We already know that it is illegal and that it should be purely and simply wiped out. But it has to be demonstrated to everybody’s satisfaction that this is the correct thing to do, and that is why such an enquiry is necessary. So instead of fantasising about an imaginary “fiscal revolution” and competing with the bourgeoisie in this field, the Left Front should simply take up and popularise this slogan. There is no doubt that it will

find agreement among working people and support from activists. It will also, at a stroke, take care of the very real problems of municipal councils with no money and unable to do all the things they ought to do and which have been made even more difficult by their excessive debts.

(I am perfectly within my rights in making a little detour, within the context of a discussion of taxation, to the discussion between François Chesnais and Thomas Piketty over the latter's latest book *Capital in the 20th Century*. Having correctly established that in this book Piketty "is going to deal [above all] with the distribution of wealth", Chesnais rightly criticises this conception of inequality [distribution of wealth] "which has very little to say about the ownership of the means of production it is based on".

Now this sort of brief comment is virtually all he says about this in the course of a polite and amicable discussion! And yet precisely the main question is this attempt to conceal the fact that the source and origin of all the evils of capitalism is production itself, and to replace it with a quasi-autonomous system of distribution that you could improve independently of production. I cannot deal with Pittkey's book as a whole here, but merely comment that this economist is one of the chief ideologues of the nowadays very fashionable current in favour of channelling the growing resentment against capitalism into this blind alley of distribution. Chesnais understands this completely. So it's all very well him saying, in his inimitable, well-bred intellectual style, that "the social conditions for this (capitalist) production determine the configurations of this distribution from the outset", but he does not develop this short passage into a fuller analysis, and even less does he extend that analysis to deal with the role this conception has in the plans and programmes of various currents and political parties made up of those who want to "reform" capitalism. It is a great shame, especially since twenty years ago Chesnais was one of the

small number of Marxist economists, from where he has only recently sunk back to the level of petit-bourgeois anti-capitalists in Attac.)

### **The real meaning of unemployment – Who claims to have an effective programme to fight it?**

Even though the forthcoming elections only affect local government, it would be an obvious mistake to confine the stakes involved to just local problems, important as these may be. On the one hand the advanced stage reached in the bourgeois demolition of social gains in all fields (carried out and organised by the SP-Green government) and the rapidly and continually deteriorating situation working people are in, and on the other the requirements of building and strengthening the political party of the working class, insistently require a fighting programme which can unite working people in every locality beyond their local demands. Such a programme would necessarily have to combat the very source of the evils, i.e. the capitalist system itself, instead of losing itself in the blind alleys of some illusory "improvement". Such an overall orientation would also distinguish it from scattered occasional criticisms whose targets shift on a more or less monthly basis. Necessarily, only through such a project can you set yourself up to really oppose that manager of moribund capitalism that is the present government. That is also the only way to rally the workers for a real fight and for driving a wedge between the government and all those who really want to struggle for the interests of working people, which includes certain members and cadres of the PS.

Such a programme would not be hard or difficult to work out because it would not be some artificial invention. It flows directly from the situation and responds to the immediate concerns of all working people. Today, it concerns the massive unemployment which already affects a growing number of working people and threatens all the rest. It is mass unemployment,

and its reasons and causes go far beyond those that produce, maintain and increase the “reserve army of labour”, the traditional scourge of capitalism. There is more to it this time. As a mass, it is no longer just the inevitable product of the contradictory expansion of capital, but on the contrary it is the decisive sign and one of the direct consequences and ineluctable traumatic sequels of capitalism in its death agony. It is no longer just a *reserve* army, from which capital can recruit workers as it expands. The majority of those currently unemployed are *excluded* from production for good, without any hope of getting back in. The fact that their number is growing is the most eloquent and convincing proof that even if here and there and from time to time it can happen, that famous economic growth has everywhere become notoriously inadequate.

The vulgar explanation for this phenomenon is simple. Everybody knows it and everybody talks about it at great length, without, however, really considering it or its causes and consequences at all seriously. Broadly speaking, it has to do with the way industry has been largely dismantled, a veritable industrial counter-revolution which has ravaged all the economically advanced countries in recent decades. With capitalist economy swooning from exhaustion – due to the historic blind alley reached by production based on and ruled by profit – the crisis has mutated from a passing purge into a permanent and universal fever, considerably weakening the moribund patient. Let me just explain very briefly here: This “exhaustion” and “historic blind alley” capitalist production faces signify the general fall in the rate of profit and the concomitant global orientation of world capitalism towards, on the one hand, transferring production to more “profitable” locations and, on the other, the extension of the hegemonic domination of finance.

The bankruptcies of a string of firms one after the other make this picture particularly sombre, painfully marked by the

acceleration thereby revealed in the process of concentration and centralisation. I shall not go into the calamitous statistics on this which over the last thirty years have caused growing alarm even for those political managers who enthusiastically maintain the system. A brief comment will suffice to emphasise two important historical facts: On the one hand the sad reality of the unemployment which has always plagued capitalism as an organic and natural part. Even during the famous "thirty glorious years" (1945-1975) – the age of reference for all the admirers (and dupes) of the system – the years of so-called "full employment" including in the "welfare states", unemployment was never, anywhere able to fall below an official level of 2.5% per cent of the active population, whereas in the USSR and in the Eastern European countries they dominated, anti-working class and anti-democratic as the Stalinist regime was, unemployment – and capitalists – were unknown. These were palpable reflections of what survived of the October Revolution, despite the fact that many of its legacies were liquidated. These facts are shrouded in absolute silence and obscured by the loud, hateful denunciations of the revolution and the USSR on the part of the bourgeoisie – and renegades – and their servile submission to the bourgeoisie's dubious traditions.

Since there is no hope of curing the epidemic of unemployment, the system is forced to nursemaid it somehow, and the whole set of political and trade union arrangements for dealing with it in all their manifestations are completely helpless. Their total impotence starts with their utter inability to explain the phenomenon, still less why it keeps getting worse. When they gravely explain that unemployment is caused by a lack of industries, this insight thoroughly deserves its place alongside all other statements of the bloody obvious. Next, they all put forward their own remedy, a whole massive spectrum from simple sticking plasters to universal panaceas. What unites them all is a rather dubious good-will, except for a very few currents and organisations which openly say they

want to finish off capitalism. All the rest put forward elixirs for re-invigorating the moribund system and making its raddled face less repulsive. Which is why there is nothing you can do with all this made-up nonsense, and no point wasting time on it.

A central role among these charlatan quacks falls to president Hollande, elected, among other things, for his pompous promise to put an end to this gangrene in the body of perishing capitalism. But a year later his own statistical services report that over the "... 12 previous months, 43 981 businesses have been liquidated (out of 62 431 bankruptcies) ... 2 per cent more than in 2009" and that "over the last year, the number of liquidations has gone up from 6 per cent to reach a record high". (Le Monde, 22 November 2013). All that despite the minister Montebourg, a tame and useful "left" puppet what with his teeth-grinding and the rest of his grotesque contortions as if to pantomime an interest on the part of the authorities in really finding a solution, while at the same time ridiculing it. And of course unemployment spreads inexorably alongside plant closures.

Its worrying growth threatens to bring the whole damn system into disrepute, and the bourgeoisie and its various agencies try to hide it behind various screens. Generally the most widespread form this latent unemployment takes is casual employment (*précarité* in French) in all its varieties. One of them is the short-term contract (in French *CDD* - "*contrat de travail de durée déterminée*"), something which has recently taken off in a big way. The same issue of *Le Monde* quoted above splashes the sinister news across its front page that: "3.7 million employment contracts for less than one month were signed in the first quarter of 2013: the number has doubled in ten years." And on an inside page the paper tells us that "...more short term contracts have been signed in France in 2013 than ever before", quoting a report from URSSAF (the central body of the agencies which collect the employee and employer

social security contributions in France) that "... more than 86 per cent of the employment contracts currently being signed ... are short term contracts. An absolute record since 2000". To provide a striking image of this, the paper also quotes the informed views of a well-placed economist: "Out of 20 million contracts signed each year, two thirds are short term contracts of less than one month. It's spectacular." – more accurately, it's nightmarish. This way, this capitalist society is ceaselessly and ever faster suppurating at least three large categories of unemployed: Officially-recognised unemployed, the non-recognised unemployed who are lost and damned, and a vast army of latent unemployed, a large proportion of whom are maintained in their precarious existence (while another, far from negligible proportion is shunted off into early and actuarially-reduced retirement, a state that is insecure and instable and precarious in its very essence, a veritable forcing-house of poverty.)

Above, where I mentioned the widespread agreement among all parties, groups, ideologies and currents in political and trade-union thinking, both left and right, about reducing, if not actually abolishing, unemployment even within the framework of capitalism, I drew no distinctions between them. But there is one sizable cleavage within this unity which separates them into two distinct and even opposed groups. A minority makes a serious effort to reduce unemployment and sincerely tries to fight for the right to work. Broadly, this embraces the Left Front and its sympathisers and the CGT unions and occasionally the FO unions. Most, on the other hand, (including the bourgeois parties, the CFDT unions and their ilk and, above all, the Hollande government) cynically and brutally plan, present and use their schemes for tackling unemployment as terrible weapons for degrading every aspect of working conditions. The jobs these people offer are nothing but shameless blackmail used to impose, by shock, an indecent increase in both the absolute and relative surplus value extracted by lengthening the working day and cutting wages by

holding them down as the rate and intensity of work increases. And that goes nowhere near exhausting the list of measures and forms of refined servitude in return for the offer of a job involving cheap and almost certainly casual labour. So what Hollande and his supporters offer the actual and potential unemployed is the glowing prospect of entering the ranks of the latent unemployed, as long as they agree to being exploited even more. You can reject out of hand all the Hollande government's efforts and attempts to buy the capitalists' goodwill, with a bankrupt and cash-strapped state handing them billions to employ more people (under much-reduced conditions, obviously). Just as obviously, the capitalists pocketed all these sumptuous gifts, but instead of acting out Hollande's fantasies, they obeyed the implacable laws of their system, and didn't employ any new workers!

Facts are obstinate things, as we all know. Unemployment has continued to rise despite all these plans and efforts, and the scandalous fact that the bourgeoisie has managed to blackmail workers (and all working people) into accepting seriously worse conditions, and to seriously weaken their powers of resistance – with the valuable help of the SP and the conciliator unions (CFDT) etc. But if some unions (CGT and perhaps FO) and parties (Left Front) and groups and other formations do carry on their customary fight against this disaster, they all realise more or less confusedly that their traditional methods of fighting are no longer adequate. The harsh social reality of capitalism with its back to the wall has made the old slogans and methods of fighting null and void and ineffective. You have to go with the evidence: If working people's organisations don't change their slogans and methods, they will all gradually start to look like Don Quixote, exhausted by vain battles. With the notable difference that their wooden swords won't be used on innocent, passive windmills but will shatter on the pitiless reality of capital determined to defend itself with every means at its disposal.

There are extremely worrying signs, such as the loss of trade union membership and the massive levels of abstention, not to say indifference, by working people in elections, which indicate a dumb but critical disapproval of and opposition towards these means of struggle that are past their sell-by date and overtaken by events. Although they cannot by themselves spontaneously and on their own find a way out of the blind alley they are in, their attitude all the more clearly expresses for them the urgent necessity of changing methods and slogans which are no longer adequate for the struggle. All they need to do, these organisations which claim to represent their interest, is to respond to these preoccupations, foremost among them the Left Front, which should also express what they want in the preparations for the municipal elections.

The starting point for such a project is to state firmly that capitalism and its managers are obviously bankrupt when it comes to resolving the various difficulties in the economy, above all the unemployment blighting the lives of millions. There is abundant evidence that capitalism is not only unable to solve of it but inexhaustibly, tirelessly organises it. The programme of a Left Front that is really up to its mission of expressing what working people say and want should therefore concentrate on the permanent and consistent struggle against unemployment, that nationwide scourge which affects every municipality.

This starting point therefore culminates in a central demand in such a programme, based on the total bankruptcy of the bourgeoisie and its plans and efforts to save businesses within the economic, legal and administrative frameworks of this system. So it must aim to go beyond them. It is high time to stop vainly begging capital to behave responsibly. It has proved many times not just that it simply cannot, but that massive and growing chronic unemployment is necessary for it simply to keep going. So we need to to deprive capital of its

ability to arrange the whole economy as its own exclusive property and place it under the watchful control of the workers themselves. Capital has amply demonstrated that its aim is to maintain and extend levels of unemployment. Hence the demand for *workers' control of production*, which grows out of this untenable situation.

It seems that workers at "Goodyear" at Amiens, exasperated by the light-minded way their bour-geois owners condemned them to unemployment and poverty, are not only keen to re-connect with the great tradition of workers' control and even factory occupations, but have already taken the first steps along that path. The generalisation of their struggle and its conscious expression in a demand for workers' control should therefore be *at the centre* of a Left Front programme for the municipal elections, buttressed by a vigorous repeat of the demand for an independent public inquiry into state – and municipal! – debt. Taking up the demand, betrayed by Hollande and Co., for the right of foreigners to vote in the municipal elections would nicely round off this programme, while at the same time widening the trench between SP (etc.) activists and the government.

### **Left Front at the crossroads**

Ever since the differences broke out over electoral tactics, the respective political lines of all the par-ties and groups in the Left Front have thrown into even harsher relief the mistakes, faults, shortcomings and inadequacies of each of them in turn. These weaknesses have grown more worrying as the situation has degenerated and the dispute, in contrast, has become more poisonous. Lacking the solid backbone which only a bold and adequate programme that responds to the serious problems working people face could provide, these differences have degenerated into a bar-room brawl. The lack of an *adequate* programme, that reflects the bankruptcy of the bourgeoisie and offers a real way out of the general blind alley that capitalism is in, is paralysing and blocking the

development of the Left Front and each of its components. Worse, it condemns them to marking time and the threat of a general step backwards.

Even those whose raise the real problems, like the above-mentioned Christian Picquet, lack clarity and serious objectives and fall into the crudest opportunism. He decided to support the Paris SP in exchange for a few miserable paid positions within its arrangements – but without the SP making the slightest changes to its programme. So Picquet sold his programme (if he ever had one) to secure a place in the future municipal bureaucracy of Paris. Moreover, the real and welcome opportunity of strengthening and widening the contradictions between the SP activists and the government was thus reduced the level of shameless horse-trading.

Now a political programme that arises directly from the untenable situation and matches up with working peoples' needs and requirements, like workers' control of production, which appears to be the only real and effective barrier to unemployment, inevitably requires broad co-operation among all the forces of working people. Only blind belief in the omnipotence of the word could lead one to imagine, as comrade Mélanchon seems to, that it is a waste of time to seek and establish alliances based on a programme with slogans that can be acted upon. But you don't need a programme if you are doing unprincipled deals and sharing out jobs in the municipal bureaucracy, like the CP and following them Picquet.

It is not just sterile propagandism that is on trial here, with its idealist delusion that it can win over the mass of working people with pure verbiage (words and discussion), but also the fact that even this propagandism is reduced to conveying a policy which consists essentially of a partial *critique* of dominant bourgeois policy instead of developing a political line *opposed* to it. It is high time to recognise that such an attitude, *negative* when all is said and done, is a brake on all progress and a source of fruitless dissensions.

Only a constructive i.e. *positive* policy expressed in the kind of programme required by the situation would be able to draw workers along with it and at the same time overcome differences.

All the signs are that only a programme like that, supported by a broad mobilisation of working people, can provide the basis for the opening needed towards activists in other parties (SP, Ecologists, etc.) with a view to exploding the contradiction between them and the government. It is the same path towards strengthen a great proletarian party in the way that is needed, a party whose painful birth-pangs are represented, as it goes and above all, in the convulsions racking the Left Front. The latter is still far from fit for the role, even if it does manage to survive the various stages leading to it.

It is important immediately to emphasise here how vitally essential the trade unions are as partners in such a political programme as formulated and concretised above and, by the same token, associated in a political mobilisation, including for the municipal elections. It is clear that if it, for example, did launch a political programme centred on the demand for workers' control, the Left Front would no longer be able to maintain a polite distance from the unions, nor keep up its accommodating behaviour towards them as they are now. It would quickly be forced, and already is anyway, to define a consistent worked-out political line in relation to them, the first point of which should be to specify how to turn them from "social partners" of the bourgeoisie into fighting organisations of working people. A political programme in favour of these working people could tolerate the slightest equivocation on this point.

It must be obvious to anyone who looks objectively at society without self-satisfied blinkers that a political party that fights for workers and wants to change the disastrous situation in their favour – in this case the Left Front –

could not, as it stands, conquer power in one dash, like a cavalry charge. So audacious an undertaking requires a tenacious and extremely careful preparation, especially under present-day conditions, which are shaped by a long retreat in the international workers' movement and weakened by a series of painful defeats and serious losses. Sadly, we are still in a period of defeats and a general retreat. This is the time to sharpen our weapons and assemble our forces, in a word, to prepare patiently the inevitable general rise of the working class and all working people in the decisive struggle against capital. Despite the sceptics and those who mock such a "utopian" view, all the "realist" alternatives and shifts and all the artificial shortcuts for getting over problems are condemned to failure.

The Left Front has reached a cross-roads. But at this point it must be realised, on the one hand, that history does not wait for those who do not make it to the appointment on time, and, on the other, that politics abhors a vacuum. Either the Left Front will seize the opportunity offered by the municipal and European elections to raise itself to the level of its historical tasks, or it will inevitably go backwards.

Balazs Nagy