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New party based on 40-year struggle...

France, 1969-2009: Once Upon a Time, the LCR...

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On Thursday 5 February, 2009 the 18th Congress of the LCR (Ligue communiste révolutionnaire - Revolutionary Communist League) decided on its dissolution, as a prelude to the foundation, February 6-8, of the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (NPA, New Anti-capitalist Party).

The LCR - "the Ligue" -, was an adventure which, under different names (Cercles des diffuseurs de Rouge, Ligue communiste, Front communiste révolutionnaire and finally Ligue communiste révolutionnaire) lasted nearly 40 years.

1969, April.

The Ligue communiste! In autumn 1968, a revolutionary current composed of militants originating from the Jeunesse communiste révolutionnaire and the Parti communiste internationaliste - two organizations dissolved by the government in June 1968 - and of "May militants" come together around a new newspaper, Rouge. After several months of discussions, the Ligue communiste is created: it is defined as a revolutionary organization, in the Leninist and anti-Stalinist tradition. It becomes the French section of the Fourth International, the movement created by Leon Trotsky. Very quickly, it has its baptism of fire, with the candidacy of Alain Krivine, aged 27, at the presidential election.

1972, June.

"When they are ministers". This is the title of the pamphlet published by the League a few days after the signature of the common program of government between the Socialist Party, the Communist Party and the Left Radicals. How to take into account the aspiration of the people of the left to unity and change, while denouncing the dead end which reformist solutions constitute? How to preserve political independence with respect to the institutional left, without sinking into sectarian isolation? So many debates which will take place within the League... for so many years!

1973, June.

Fascist meeting, meeting banned. In spring 1973, the League plays a major part during the mobilizations of high-school pupils and students against the Debré law (suppression of military deferments). In June, it initiates a demonstration to prevent the holding of a racist meeting by the far right Ordre nouveau group, which the police force protects. Following the confrontations, the Ligue communiste is dissolved by the government. The militants reorganize around the newspaper Rouge and are prominent in the great demonstration of support for the workers at Lip, then in the mobilizations in solidarity with the Chilean people, the victims of Pinochet.

1974, May.

Under the uniform, you remain a worker. Taking up a list of social and democratic demands, "the Appeal of the hundred" circulates in the barracks and collects thousands of signatures quickly. For some years, the League has developed intervention based around demands and antimilitarism among the enlisted. Soon, dozens of committees of soldiers will organize, to publish bulletins and to even organize demonstrations of the enlisted in uniform, with the support of part of the trade union movement.

1976, March.

And Rouge goes daily. To provide the means of meeting the evolution of the political and social situation on a daily basis, in particular from the point of view of the left coming to power, the League transforms Rouge into a daily newspaper. After a first phase of success, the adventure proves beyond the financial means of the organization. Rouge returns to its weekly rhythm of publication in 1979.

1977, autumn.

No socialism without Women's Liberation. After 1968, the eruption of the Women's Liberation Movement shook the League and caused debates on feminism and the autonomous movements. Struggles against specific oppression, mobilizations for the right to contraception and abortion, wage discrimination, violence: the feminist "class struggle" current tries to theorise the articulation between capitalist exploitation and the oppression of women, between class struggle and feminist struggle. In November 1977, under the aegis of the Women's secretariat of the Ligue, the first issue of Cahiers du féminisme appears, with the final issue being published in 1998.

1985, January.

Solidarity with Kanaky. The Ligue protests against the assassination - by the GIGN and under a left government - of Éloi Machoro, one of the leaders of the independence movement in Kanaky- New Caledonia. Since the 1970s, on many occasions, the League always brought its militant solidarity to the partisans of the socialist independence of New Caledonia, in struggle against French colonialism. Just as it was always present in the anti-imperialist mobilizations: the Vietnam War, Nicaraguan revolution, Zapatista rising, the struggle of the Palestinian people.

1988, May.

A new politics on the left? For the presidential election, the LCR supports the candidature of Pierre Juquin, a Communist Party dissident. With the blossoming of dozens of committees, the campaign is a real militant success... which will not be confirmed by the electoral result. But new debates emerge on the conception of the party to be built and the prospect of going beyond the LCR.

1989, July.

There are still Bastilles to take. Whereas François Mitterrand chooses to celebrate the bicentenary of the French revolution by hosting the G7 (the leaders of the seven richest countries), the League initiates a unitary campaign - "Ça suffat comme ci" -, which organizes a big demonstration for the abolition of the Third World debt and against the "slaughterers of the world", as well as a giant concert, at the place de la Bastille, with Renaud and Johnny Clegg (South Africa). A foretaste of the big future global justice gatherings.

1992, November.

New period, new programme, new party. Adopted by the national congress of the LCR, proclamation "To the left of possible" synthesizes the debates raised by the fall of the Berlin Wall, the breakup of the USSR and capitalist restoration: the collapse of the Stalinist system is not the "end of the history". The class struggle continues. But the period has changed: it is necessary to work out a new program for emancipation and to build a new type of party, rallying those who want to finish with the system, whatever their convictions on the means of reaching that point.

1995, November-December.

Against the Juppe plan. Absent from the presidential election, the LCR will be on the other hand very present, in November and December 1995, via its trade union and associative militants in the great mobilizations - strikes and demonstrations - against the Juppe plan for the dismantling of Social security and the first attacks against the pension system of the railway workers.

1999, June.

Revolutionaries in the European Parliament. By exceeding the 5% threshold the joint LO-LCR list allows the election of five revolutionary deputies to the European Parliament, including Alain Krivine and Roseline Vachetta for the LCR. This election durably installs the revolutionary left as a minority but significant and legitimate current on the political scene.

2000, June.

A phase of revolutionary regroupment. The Ligue has a long tradition of regroupment with, in particular, a current of the PSU in the early 1970s, and a minority of the Organisation communiste des travailleurs (OCT) in 1979. In 2000, the 14th Congress of the LCR voted for fusion/integration with Voix des travailleurs, a revolutionary organization of militants expelled from Lutte ouvrière. This fusion allowed a break with the logic of dispersal which had prevailed for a long time within the revolutionary left. Thereafter, other currents joined the League, including a minority of Gauche révolutionnaire and the Socialisme par en bas organization.

2001, June.

Prohibition of dismissals. On June 9, tens of thousands of people demonstrate against the plans for suppression of jobs and demand a ban on dismissals. The initiative for this mobilization comes from the LU workers, quickly joined by the inter-union coordinations of a series of companies threatened by "reorganizations", Solidaires, the FSU and with support from the CGT. New factor, several left-wing political parties take part in the mobilization: the PCF, LO, Alternative libertaire. And, of course, the LCR... At the end of June, a national conference of the LCR decides to run a candidate at the presidential election: Olivier Besancenot, 27 years, a postal worker.

2002, April.

Our lives are worth more than their profits. This was the slogan of Olivier's campaign. Gradually, the size of the meetings increased. As soon as the 500 signatures were collected, media access makes it possible to transmit the message on a new scale for the LCR. The earthquake caused by elimination, at the first round of the presidential election, of the socialist candidate, Lionel Jospin, eclipses the incredible result obtained: 4.25%! But, on the evening of April 21, in every town in France, the League is in the front line of the demonstrations against Le Pen, which will develop over the next fortnight.

2003, spring.

“General Strike, general strike”. For several months, the employees in national education clash with the government’s counter-reforms. Imposing demonstrations punctuate the teaching strike. Then, the strike extends throughout the public sector, faced with the governmental desire to extend to 40 the number of years of work necessary for a pension. Like many trade-unionists, the militants of the LCR defend the perspective of a general strike.

2005, March.

It’s “no”! In spite of the support of all of the economic, political and media elites, the neoliberal European constitutional is rejected by a majority of voters. It is the result of several months of an intense unitary campaign, which gathered many political and associative forces (including the LCR) and involved tens of thousands of people. In November, following the death of two young people who were being chased by the police, the popular neighbourhoods revolt and face the forces of repression. The Ligue’s support for the demands of young people against discrimination and police harassment contrasts with the embarrassment, even hostility, of the traditional left.

2007, June.

Rallying the anti-capitalists. The attempts to prolong the “no” coalition into a unitary candidacy for the presidential election fails on the question of independence with respect to the Socialist Party. The LCR decides to run Olivier Besancenot. Whereas all the other candidates to the left of the Socialists record poor scores, the LCR gets 300,000 votes more than in 2002. A result which gives the LCR particular responsibilities, the more so given the electoral failure of the Socialists and, especially, their later inability to oppose Sarkozy, reinforcing the need for a “left which is not ashamed of being left”. In June 2007, the national leadership of the LCR decides to test the possibility of creating a new party. In August, Olivier popularizes this project: “The League has a rendezvous with its history”.

2008, January.

New party, it’s begun! The 17th Congress of the LCR lays down the objective of “going beyond the LCR” to a new anti-capitalist party, “taking up the best traditions of the various currents of the labour movement”. After the local elections of March 2008, more than 300 committees for a new anti-capitalist party are created. In January 2009, there are 476, with 9,123 activists. With the NPA, a new adventure starts!

P.S.

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