

French Marxists debate on a new workers' party

Call for a new workers' party

Lutte Ouvriere, 28 April 1995

ON THE EVENING of the first round, Arlette Laguiller announced, after the declaration of our results, that the activists and sympathisers of *Lutte Ouvriere* were going to try to meet as many as possible of those — workers manual and white-collar, unemployed, youth — who voted for the programme which she presented, in order to discuss with everyone who will accept that programme and sketch with them the possibilities and conditions of the construction of a party placing itself resolutely and exclusively on the basis of the political defence of the exploited.

It is not a matter, in our view, of trying once again to bring about the fusion of the existing groups in what remains of the far left, or around the ecologists, or round those who have chosen to call themselves the "alternative forces".

All those activists, whose commitment we respect, have chosen their terrain of struggle, and most often it is not, or is no longer, that of the defence of the workers...

Our activists and sympathisers going to try to call meetings, in the coming weeks, in as many as possible workplaces, neighbourhoods, schools, and colleges, around this question [of a new party]. They will also try to go to the towns and regions, unfor-

tunately too numerous, where we have as yet no presence.

Finally, we also want to make the annual *Lutte Ouvriere* fete in Paris, at the Whit weekend, 3-4-5 June, a great political rally, oriented towards these discussions and exchanges for the construction of such a party...

The second round

Editorial signed by Arlette Laguiller, *Lutte Ouvriere*, 28 April 1995

I HAVE SAID since the beginning of this campaign that, for our part, we would abstain on the second round and thus we would not call for a vote for Lionel Jospin.

Those who voted for me knew this choice in advance.

In fact, only cosmetics differentiate the representatives of the Socialist Party and of the RPR. They are both men of the boss-class who have appealed to the working classes with vague promises...

In 1981, we called for a vote for Francois Mitterrand at the second round, while explaining that this was without any illusions about what he would bring, but from solidarity with the millions of left voters, workers, and ordinary people, who wanted to put an end to the years and years of the right holding political power and who hoped for a lot from the left.

In 1988, we did not repeat that call



Arlette Laguiller

between the two rounds... The first seven years... had shown adequately that the workers could expect nothing from the Socialist Party in power...

Today, we have the same attitude towards Lionel Jospin that we had towards Mitterrand in 1988. We do not want to stop the workers and the left electorate from voting for Lionel Jospin, and we will do nothing to that end.

We will therefore not call for abstention, but we will not call for a vote for Lionel Jospin either, who is, like Chirac, a representative of the bosses...

The way they voted

ARLETTE LAGUILLER won 1.6 million votes, or 5.3 per cent of the total, in the first round on 23 April 1995. In previous presidential elections she had won 605,000 votes in 1988, 668,000 votes in 1981, and 601,000 in 1974. The result is also much better than the vote won by a revolutionary candidate — Alain Krivine of the LCR — in 1969, soon after the great general strike of May-June 1968. Krivine got 236,000 votes.

The other candidates' scores in the first round were: 3.3 per cent for the Green candidate, Dominique Voynet; 5.3 per cent for the maverick right-winger Philippe de Villiers; 8.7 per cent for Robert Hue of the Communist Party; 15.2% for Jean-Marie Le Pen of the National Front; 18.5 per cent for Edouard Balladur; 20.6 per cent for Jacques Chirac; and 23.2 per cent for Lionel Jospin of the Socialist Party. Chirac got 53 per cent of the votes in

the run-off on 7 May, and Jospin 47 per cent.

Of those who voted for Arlette Laguiller in the first round, 61% voted Jospin in the second round, 10% for Chirac. 10% cast blank ballots, and 19% did not vote.

Of those who voted for Jean-Marie Le Pen in the first round, 17% voted Jospin, 39% Chirac, 13% blank, and 31% did not vote in the second round.

Among managers and professionals, Chirac beat Jospin 59:41. Among small shopkeepers, farmers, etc. he won 77:23. Among manual workers Jospin won 57:43, among white-collar workers 51:49. Those who described themselves as "well-off" voted 71:29 for Chirac; those who described themselves as "working-class", 62:38 for Jospin. Practising Catholics voted 74:26 for Chirac; people without religion voted 69:31 for Jospin. [Source: *Le Monde*, 10 May 1995]

An emergency plan for the workers

Lutte Ouvriere, 28 April 1995

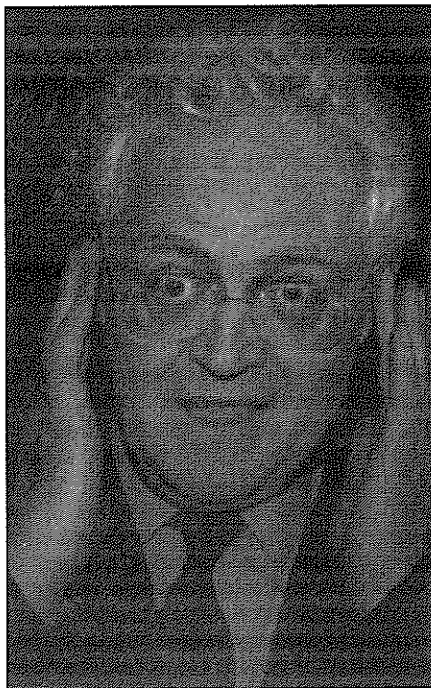
AFTER 7 MAY as before, the workers will have no other choice but to fight to impose their demands. And to really overturn the relation of forces, it is necessary that they fight together, round a common programme and objectives which are those of the whole of the working class.

Thus, the "emergency plan for the workers and the unemployed" advocated by Arlette Laguiller in her campaign remains more relevant than ever. Let us recall its main points:

- 1500 francs [about £200, per month] immediate increase in wages. This would only catch up on the loss of spending power in the years of wage controls.

- The immediate requisition of all firms which make sackings, beginning with those which are making profits.

- A halt to all the subsidies paid to the bosses on the pretext of encouraging them to create jobs, and the direct creation of those jobs by the state with the money



Candidate of the discredited Socialist Party, Jospin

thus saved.

- A policy of public works in order to give the public services the material means they are lacking, financed by taxing the rich.

- The immediate suppression of all the tax and social-security contribution concessions given to the bosses since the beginning of the crisis.

- The restoration of the tax on company profits, at least to its old level of 50 per cent. Currently it is being reduced to 33 per cent.

- The restoration and increase of the higher rates of income tax, and the suppression of all the loopholes enabling the richest to pay proportionally less tax than wage-workers...

And also...

- The obligation for all firms to make their accounts public.

- The obligation for the main politicians and the big bosses to make public their wealth and their income...

Obviously this programme has to be imposed on the government as well as on the bosses. But the objective of the 1500 franc increase has already become a common objective of [recent] strikes... And in the post and in public transport, the workers have begun to put on the agenda the question of halting job cuts and rehiring in order to restore proper functioning of the public services...

The LCR's assessment

Article by Alain Krivine, *Rouge*, 27 April 1995

OF ALL THE FIGURES of the first round of the presidential election, two should hold our attention, because their significance is essential for the future. The sum of the

votes gained by the three candidates (Laguiller, Voynet, Hue) to the left of the SP... was 5,248,943 votes (17.33%). As for the CP, it got only half that total, and can no longer claim a monopoly or hegemony. Let us add a third fact: the exceptional score gained by an avowed Trotskyist candidate, which was not solely a matter of the personality of Arlette...

During the campaign... these three candidate developed common themes — the balance-sheet of the left in power, the struggle against unemployment and racism, the 35 hour week, the right to vote for immigrants, wage increases, workers' control, defence of the environment, etc.

As the campaign progressed, the three representatives became more radical, under the influence of the social mobilisations. Voynet pushed her discourse to the left and highlighted her links with a section of the critical left. Laguiller went, for the first time, from her correct but abstract denunciations of capitalism and the bourgeoisie to the approach of an emergency plan, leading at the end of the campaign to the proposal to create a big new party.

The result of these elections, the fact that it is not only we who add up these three votes politically, fully confirms the well-foundedness of the LCR's approach. We wanted a single candidate, in order to create a unitary dynamic going beyond this score and staking out the ground for joint work by the anti-capitalist forces...

When Arlette Laguiller proposes, after the election result, discussions "with everyone who will accept it, to sketch with them the conditions of the creation of a big party placing itself on the basis of the political defence of the exploited", including, she adds, with those who preferred a "tactical" vote for Jospin, we have the impression that we are hearing something new from her. To defend the exploited does not imply, as a precondition, to be a revolutionary. It is on that broad basis that we have for years advocated the creation of a new force. And it is necessary to address oneself to the political currents which, however limited they may be, want to assert an alternative pole to the traditional left, unless one wants to make of this project a pure sectarian operation of the development of one's own party. It is with this objective and on these political bases that we work and debate with our partners in the CAP [Convention for a Progressive Alternative, a loose alliance mainly of small splinter groups from the CP and SP], with the progressive Greens or with communists...

LO answers the LCR

Lutte Ouvriere, 5 May 1995

SINCE THE announcement of the first round results, the LCR has taken a position for the second round. No hesitation or indecision this time, unlike in the first round, where it declared itself unable to indicate to its activists and sympathisers whether they should choose Robert Hue [the CP

candidate], Dominique Voynet [the Green candidate], Arlette Laguiller, or even Lionel Jospin.

This time, it was clear, sharp and quick: the LCR calls for voting Jospin, to "beat the right", so it says. But without any illusions in Jospin, it explains. It will be "only a ballot paper against Chirac" — a formula, we might note, used by the CP to explain its rallying to Jospin.

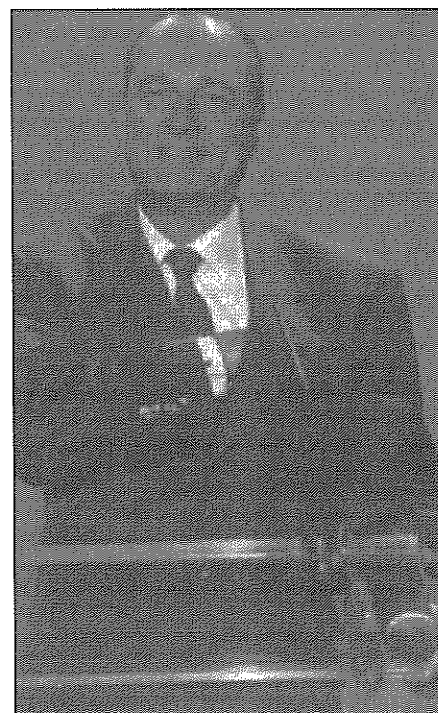
Without illusion? ... But it is an illusion, and a big one, to claim that one is going to stop the right and the far right with a ballot paper with the name Jospin printed on it. It is all the less justifiable this time when Jospin has not even chosen to present himself as a determined champion of the fight against the right and the far right.

But the LCR is not crammed full of consistency, not in relation to Jospin, and not in its assessment of the scores of what it calls "a new left".

Thus, adding up the votes of Robert Hue, Dominique Voynet and Arlette Laguiller, it notes that [the total] 17 per cent of the votes were dispersed, whereas "a single candidate would have made it possible for the demand for a different left politics to make itself heard more, to have more weight vis-a-vis the Socialist Party, and to remobilise more the voters disappointed by the official left".

There is perhaps a bit of hypocrisy in this addition. Would it have been possible to convince the Communist Party (or logical to try to) to withdraw its candidate in favour of Dominique Voynet? Not to mention Arlette Laguiller.

So what does the addition mean? That Voynet and Laguiller should not have stood, and should have called for a vote for Robert Hue?... And if so, why has the LCR tried for months to get a regroupment with Voynet, and not advised her, and us, to withdraw for Hue?... ❏



Candidate of the right: Chirac