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France

Marie-George, Arlette, José - what if we were to talk?

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The anti-liberal left has demonstrated its strength over the last year. It must be present and united at the presidential election.

Our names appear in the opinion polls about the next presidential election - four names which came out, together or separately, for an anti-liberal and internationalist rejection of the European Constitution and Treaty.

In less than a year, on the terrain of the referendum on May 29, 2005 and on the terrain of struggle in this April, liberalism suffered two setbacks, with the rejection of the Constitution and the withdrawal of the First Employment Contract (CPE). These victories have given rise to great hopes among those who suffer every day the effects of capitalist exploitation.

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/allunited.jpg>]

Jose (left), Marie-Georges (second left), Olivier (second right)

Our four names do not on their own sum up all the diversity that was expressed on the campaign for a "No" from the left. However, we have joint responsibilities. Many people want to know if a united candidacy is possible and necessary. Necessary, it certainly is, if only to respond to the unitary aspiration which has been expressed since May 29, particularly in the collectives of the same name.

But possible? The conditions for going further still don't seem to have been met. However, the obstacles to be surmounted to bring us together are known by everyone: defeat the right and its policies; reject social liberalism; do not reproduce the strategy of the plural Left [1].

To defeat the right in a lasting way is a fine thing to promise, but it is better to fight it right away. Today, we have to build a broad movement, with the widest possible unity and without sectarianism, against unemployment and job insecurity, because the law "on equal opportunity" and the CPE, its big brother, the new employment contract (CNE) are still in force [2]. So it's true that to fight resolutely against the Right without putting off till tomorrow direct confrontation with it, means undertaking to undo in the future what it has done since it came to power.

And to get rid of once and for all the evils which have rained down on us, we have to put an end to all the liberal policies, even those which were implemented by the Left when it was in power. In short, to defeat the Right and not let it come back in five years' time means implementing a plan of social and democratic emergency measures which would enable millions of people to keep their heads above water.

In order to really contest the hegemony of social liberalism on the left, we have to make another left emerge, a left that refuses the dictates of finance and of liberal Europe. We have no other choice if we want to keep our rights, or to win new ones, than to challenge the privileges of the strongest. Countering the stranglehold of the multinationals over the economy and over our lives means opposing the growing appropriation of the fruits of everyone's labour by a few big firms.

It is unimaginable to legislate effectively to ban sackings as long as the authorities do not take back from the "sackers" the subsidies that were so generously accorded them. Again, it is unimaginable to increase income or give an autonomy allowance to all young people who are in education without taking money from profits. And finally it is unimaginable to win a measure which is however free, like the moratorium on GM crops, without facing up to the

agricultural multinationals. A left which does not propose to redistribute the wealth by giving the population the means of controlling it is a left that is full of fine promises, but which once in power will not implement left policies.

Finally to be convinced that the Left doesn't have the right to get it wrong in a new experience of the plural Left is not in itself a guarantee. The "plural Left" is not a formula but a political strategy which is still the strategy of the Socialist Party: to satellise other left parties around electoral agreements in order to get them to take responsibility for the main lines of its policies.

So hope lies in opposing the Right and resisting social liberalism, by refusing for example governmental and parliamentary alliances with the Socialist Party. That would not marginalise us. The idea that we could convert the leadership of the Socialist Party to anti-liberalism or exert significant influence on the summit meeting of the Left, thinking that it could give birth to a real alternative, is an illusion. There is no synthesis possible between anti-liberalism and social liberalism. All the more so as the institution of the Fifth Republic, which prevent universal suffrage having an influence over the economic decisions that affect our daily lives, are constructed in such a way that on the left it is in reality François Hollande who sets the tone and not Marie-George Buffet, Segolène Royal rather than Arlette Laguiller, Dominique Strauss-Kahn rather Olivier Besancenot and Pascal Lamy rather than José Bové.

So yes to a unitary candidacy if it is anti-capitalist. We are more concerned with the scenario and the content than with the casting. Two scenarios can be envisaged. One starts with the European referendum campaign, continues with support for social struggles, unveils a plan of emergency measure for the popular classes and youth and leads to the coming together of anti-liberal and anti-capitalist, internationalist, feminist, and ecologist forces. The other ends up giving a left cover to a new change of government under the wing of the Socialist Party. We won't be in the second scenario.

With a good scenario the casting will be easy to sort out. Between the eight left candidacies on April 21st 2002 and a single one in 2007, there must be a happy medium. A plural Left number 2, scarcely spruced up, seems to be being reconstituted. That's its problem. The struggles of today and tomorrow deserve better than that. So, I think we need to meet and have a little chat. We will soon be meeting up in various struggles, that's for sure...but why not over dinner for four? It's on me!

This article appeared in the April 28 edition of the Paris daily Le Monde

[1] The plural Left was the name given to the governmental alliance, dominated by the Socialist Party and including the Communist Party and the Greens, under the premiership of Lionel Jospin between 1997 and 2002

[2] The CNE (New Employment Contract) allows employers in companies with less than 20 employees to sack workers without reason during the first two years of their employment - exactly as the CPE did for young people under 26