

La France Insoumise: a crisis of maturity

Friday 24 February 2023, by [DURAND Cédric](#), [KEUCHEYAN Razmig](#) (Date first published: 16 December 2022).

La France Insoumise party is at a critical moment of transformation. In this article, Razmig Keucheyan and Cédric Durand outline the steps LFI must take to preserve and grow its political project.

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La France Insoumise is undergoing a transformation. From an agile movement geared to electoral battles, it must transform itself into an irresistible force, capable not only of coming to power along with its Nupes allies, but also of successfully initiating a systemic ecological and social shift beyond capitalism. To do this, it needs to construct a durable popular force of the social and ecological left capable of being a decisive political actor for the coming decades. These challenges are considerable, but the election result last spring – a happy anomaly at the international level – obliges us to do nothing less.

Establishment and counter-hegemony

Since the summer university (the ‘Amfis’), this question of organisational change has been at the centre of discussions, leading to a new arrangement which includes important advances in the direction of activist implantation and the strengthening of ideological work. This is essential. Getting a lot of deputies elected can be a curse for an organisation dedicated to systemic change, if it leads to all energies being absorbed in the institutional game. It is then bound to lose vitality as it abandons the autonomous popular movement and its transformative antagonistic power, and gets monopolised by parliamentary arcana and media intrigue.

Thus, better coordinating action groups at the local level and giving them the material means to develop their activity is a decisive step towards a sustainable implantation. Similarly, the ambitious work of ideological production and training initiated within the framework of the Fondation La Boétie lays the foundations for a solid counter-hegemony. This work is essential not only to take root in the political landscape, but also to prepare for government and resist, once in power, the headwinds that are sure to arise. The development of parliamentary activity must be accompanied by activist strength and a cultural battle. It is a question of survival for the political project of La France Insoumise. The organisational transformations undertaken show that the subject is taken very seriously. As with the work done to develop the Avenir en Commun programme, decisions have been well thought out and tasks carried out in a meticulous and systematic way.

A legitimate leadership

With such a will, there is no reason to doubt that the implantation and counter-hegemony effort can achieve great results. But for this to happen, the organisation must have a legitimate leadership, one that aggregates forces. And here, we have to admit that it has failed. There has been a commendable effort to formalise bodies, but the designation 'by consensus' of an organisational leadership, at the end of the 'representative assembly of the movement', is, to put it mildly, clumsy. It is undoubtedly the last gasp of a mode of operation that has propelled La France Insoumise to the political forefront, and for this reason is difficult to abandon, but which is no longer adapted to the tasks of the moment.

In our view, three problems combine. The first is that of leadership. With his talent, his experience and his tremendous capacity for work, Jean-Luc Mélenchon has been dealing with this issue for a decade. By declaring, on the evening of the first round, 'Do better!', he reopened it. Perhaps too soon? It's up to him and the movement to decide in the coming years. But if JLM is the voice that carries by far the most weight, others – including those of Clémentine Autain and François Ruffin – have now gained momentum. In purely arithmetical terms, there can be no consensus without them and the sensibilities they represent.

This is precisely the second problem, the source of the malaise that pervaded the movement's forces last weekend. Manuel Bompard cannot claim a consensus on the composition of the leadership against the advice of leading figures. Such dissonance is not only uncomfortable and embarrassing, it also has powerful perverse effects. A false consensus is worse than a frank disagreement because it negates the point under discussion, leaving no room to overcome it.

La France Insoumise has a solid ideological framework with its programme. But it is not surprising that the present conjuncture and unexpected situations give rise to different assessments. It is through deliberation, the exchange of arguments, that politics is made and an organisation takes shape. We have seen this over the last few months with the treatment of sexual and sexist violence, with the strategy for broadening the electoral base, with parliamentary tactics and international solidarity. This shifting diversity is vital, it must be given a place. Otherwise, the internal debate tends to move into the media arena with all the familiar deleterious effects of exacerbation and distortion of oppositions, and their negative repercussions within public opinion. To put it in a nutshell: tightening up and opening out are two sides of the same coin.

More profoundly, and this is the third problem, there is the question of legitimacy. In this matter, we advocate democracy. And that is why the dismissal of elected representatives figures prominently in *l'Avenir en Commun*. It seems incongruous that these high standards of accountability are not reflected internally. For a force with hundreds of elected representatives, tens of thousands of activists and millions of supporters, protection from the curse of small numbers is essential, as is opening up the representative bodies to ensure that the organisation is a political commune.

It is understandable to guard against the caricatures of debate and policies of social exclusion that often characterise factional struggles in social-democratic or far-left organisations, whether we think of the unhappy combinations of François Hollande or the recent break-up of the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste. But to counter effects such as this is not enough to get rid of the problem. A political force needs a centre, and this centre – when the scale is sufficiently broad and the horizon of action extended – cannot base its legitimacy on short-term efficiency alone.

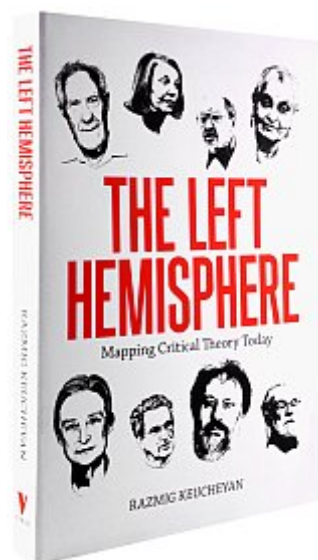
Many solutions can be envisaged that combine in one leadership different sources of legitimacy corresponding to different rhythms of commitment: elected representatives, activists, sympathisers, professionals, intellectuals, etc. In one way or another, all of them must be able to influence the

political line and internal life of the movement, according to formalised procedures and predictable processes. The objective is twofold: to allow each person to plan their commitment in full knowledge of the facts; and to avoid 'statism' by partially decoupling the movement's agenda from parliamentary events.

What applies to the movement also applies to the Fondation La Boétie. The destinies of the two are linked, since Jean-Luc Mélenchon will be a member of the France Insoumise leadership in his capacity as president of the foundation. His influence will depend on his degree of openness and his ability to manage dissent on a very wide range of subjects, from the most abstract to the most directly connected to the political situation. It is on the basis of this promise that many academics have already agreed to participate in this training school and its scientific departments, and on this condition that intellectuals will be able to sustainably participate in the essential ideological work of counter-hegemony.

La France Insoumise is at a turning point. It has the opportunity to embody a new chapter in the history of the left, and to influence the future of our country and beyond for the next century. To do this, it must find a balance between efficiency and internal democracy. The coming year, with no electoral deadlines, must be an opportunity to carry out this work

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