

France: Alain Krivine explains the role of the "New Anti-Capitalist Party"

Peter Schwarz
21 November 2008

Last week, the Internet publication *Médiapart* published an interview with Alain Krivine, the long-time leader of the French Revolutionary Communist League (LCR). The interview throws light on the programme and political role of the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA), which the LCR plans to found at the end of January.

Krivine makes three things clear: First of all, the new party will be reformist rather than revolutionary; its aim is not to build a socialist society, but rather to refurbish the existing capitalist system. Second, the new party does not represent a political break with the old, bankrupt workers' organisations, but will operate instead as a vessel for assembling disappointed reformists, Stalinists, trade unionists and petty-bourgeois "lefts." Third, the party cultivates a cynical and dismissive attitude to the traditions of the revolutionary Marxist movement.

In his first answer, Krivine reveals himself to be within the political spectrum of bourgeois politics. When asked, "How does the LCR analyse the current 'crisis' of the capitalist system?" he replies, "It is one of the big crises that periodically rock a system that is dominated by the drive for profit."

This is false and leads to completely wrong political conclusions.

The present crisis is not merely one of the cyclical downturns that grip capitalism at regular intervals—and give way to a new upsurge. It has already spread from the financial sector to the sphere of production and has led to the first worldwide recession since the Second World War. It marks a new stage in the decline of world capitalism and invokes all the historical contradictions that, between 1914 and 1945, plunged the world into revolutionary class struggles, fascist barbarism and two world wars.

At the heart of the crisis is the decline of American imperialism, whose economic superiority provided the basis for the temporary stabilisation of world capitalism after the Second World War. Now, the US is compensating for its economic decline by the aggressive deployment of its military forces. The reaction of the European ruling class has been to undertake its own military rearmament and its own initiatives to redivide the world and its resources. The growth of militarism and social reaction are two sides of the same coin.

This confronts the working class with revolutionary tasks. It can no longer defend itself on the basis of reformist or trade union methods, which seek to achieve class compromise within the context of the national state. The globalisation of production has

superseded and rendered obsolete and reactionary the borders of the national state. The decay of all reformist organisations is an expression of this fact. The crisis cannot be solved within the context of capitalist society. It confronts the working class with the task of breaking with the old reformist organisations, taking the political initiative and struggling for political power—or facing a descent into dictatorship and war. The working class is posed with the alternative: socialism or barbarism.

That is not Krivine's perspective. His estimation of the crisis does not substantially differ from that of bourgeois politicians, who—like French President Nicolas Sarkozy or German Chancellor Angela Merkel—declare that the "real economy" is basically healthy, attribute the financial crisis to the misdeeds of a few speculators and promise to resolve the problem with stricter regulations. Echoing them, Krivine declares that the crisis has taken place at a time when "financial wealth no longer corresponds to real wealth."

He proposes a series of "immediate measures"—the setting up of a public banking system subject to democratic control, a prohibition on dismissals at profitable companies, the opening of corporate books, the abolition of bank secrets, a rise in purchasing power by increasing wages and pensions, etc.

While these measures sound radical, Krivine does not link them to a programme of working class power. They are raised from the standpoint of exerting pressure on other parties. The task of the NPA is not the preparation of the working class for inevitable class confrontations by breaking it from the paralysing influence of the reformist, Stalinist and trade union apparatuses. Instead, it encourages the illusion that precisely these apparatuses can be pressured to adopt policies favourable to the interests of workers.

How closely the LCR/NPA is linked to the old bureaucratic organisations is made clear in the next paragraph of the interview.

Krivine boasts that the NPA is already exerting a positive effect on the old parties: "Even prior to its birth, it is already forcing all of the time-worn left-wing parties to define themselves in accordance with the NPA or statements made by Olivier Besancenot [the leading light of the LCR/NPA]. It is already proving useful."

In particular, Krivine appeals to all those who have been left politically stranded by the lurch to the right of their old organisations: "The NPA project consists of creating a political opening for all currents, for all persons who wish to oppose the unparalleled offensive of the entrepreneurs and the Sarkozy

government with a unified 'all together' approach."

He is pleased that so many have already taken up this appeal: "This party, which still does not even exist, has already absorbed a small group of experienced members from the Socialist Party (more than expected...) and the Communist Party, as well as a strong contingent from the trade union movement and from citizens' initiatives."

Krivine is open to any sort of political manoeuvre or combination—including participation in government. The NPA, he says, "is a tool useful for struggles, useful to develop a political alternative, and, why not, under certain, but not yet existing, conditions, useful tomorrow for the exercise of power. Nothing is impossible, a new chapter is opening up."

Krivine also declares his willingness to cooperate and draw up joint lists of candidates with other political currents. His only condition: no participation "in government coalitions with the Socialist Party, similar to the coalitions entered into by the PRC [Refounded Communism] in Italy and the Left Party in Germany."

Such declarations mean little. The timeline for such promises is usually short. In addition, there are different forms of cooperation. In 1936, the French Communist Party did not directly take part in the Popular Front government led by Léon Blum, which consisted of a coalition of the Socialist Party and bourgeois radicals. Nevertheless, the CP was Blum's most important prop, voting for his government in parliament and strangling the powerful general strike movement of that time in order to secure the survival of French capitalism.

Time will tell whether the NPA takes part in a future French government. At present, its most important task consists of cutting off a new generation of workers and young people from the inheritance of the revolutionary workers' movement. In this respect, it has a similar function to that of the Spanish POUM, whose role Trotsky described as follows: "By their general 'left' formulae the leaders of the POUM created the illusion that a revolutionary party existed in Spain and prevented the appearance of the truly proletarian, intransigent tendencies." In so doing, as Trotsky explained, the POUM bore "an enormous responsibility for the Spanish tragedy." (1)

Krivine is completely dismissive of the inheritance of the Marxist movement. He contemptuously derides the great theoretical and political debates that decided the fate of millions as a controversy over antiquated "isms."

"Up to now we have had difficulty recruiting several hundred people into the LCR who differentiated between Stalinism, Maoism, anarchism, Trotskyism and all manner of 'isms,' " Krivine declares. "Today, the revolutionaries are been heard by millions and are striving, while not denying their struggles, to develop a popular party forcing us to jointly change our vocabulary, methods and our ways of operating."

Krivine categorically dismisses the tradition of Trotskyism, which the LCR had invoked (falsely) up to now: "As a party which seeks to 'revolutionise society,' the NPA will not be 'Trotskyist.' Instead, it will strive to synthesise what is positive in the different traditions of the workers' movement, enriched by the contribution of the critics of globalisation, environmentalists, feminists, and not least the experience of those who come from traditional parties or

the anarchist movement."

This opportunist mixing of irreconcilable political currents into a political mishmash is reactionary. One cannot "synthesise" Stalinism and Trotskyism. What separates them is not just differences of opinion but, in Trotsky's words, a river of blood. The Stalinist regime murdered far more communists than the fascists, as the Italian fascist leader Mussolini once declared. The conflict between Trotskyism and Stalinism was the highest theoretical and political expression of the international class struggle itself. Stalinism was responsible for defeats of the working class whose impact has lasted for generations. The same can be said with regard to the Marxist movement's disputes with reformists and anarchists.

A revolutionary socialist strategy can be developed only on the basis of an assimilation of the lessons of past struggles. Only when the working class learns from history and draws lessons from earlier victories and defeats can it be prepared for a new period of revolutionary conflict. At the heart of these lessons is the struggle waged by the Fourth International against Stalinism, reformism, Pabloite revisionism and all other forms of political opportunism. The most important lessons of the twentieth century are summarised in this tradition.

The LCR/NPA deliberately strives to sever workers and young people from this history and from the political knowledge that must be extracted from history. It turns toward a new generation that grew up in a period marked by the collapse of the Soviet Union and amidst a propaganda campaign proclaiming the alleged "failure of socialism," and which knows little of the revolutionary traditions of the workers' movement. But it does so not to politically educate this generation, but rather to imbue it with contempt for theory and history. Such a movement can only serve as an impediment to the revolutionary development of the working class and a prop for bourgeois rule.

• 1) Leon Trotsky, "Centrism and the 4th International," 10 March 1939.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact