

# Olivier Besancenot in Poland

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Olivier Besancenot's participation in the European election congress of the Polish Party of Labour (PPP) in Katowice last weekend makes clear the real aims of his newly founded New Anti-capitalist Party (Nouveau parti anticapitaliste).

Behind all the talk of anti-capitalism and the calls for militancy, the French NPA is pursuing a thoroughly reactionary political agenda and is quite prepared to work together with openly right-wing organizations. In Katowice, Besancenot spoke at a meeting of the PPP, which includes within its ranks supporters of the former Polish dictator Pilsudski and ex-functionaries of the right-wing populist party, Samoobrona.

One of the main speakers at the congress was Bogdan Golik, the vice-chairman of the Polish Chamber of Commerce. Five years ago, Golik was elected to the European parliament on the Samoobrona list and now sits there as part of the social-democratic group. In June, Golik made his first appearance in Lodz as the PPP's leading candidate for the European election.

While in France Besancenot constantly stresses he will not co-operate with the Socialist Party, he had no inhibitions about appearing in Poland alongside a man who sits in Strasbourg with the French Socialists in a parliamentary group, works full-time as an economic lobbyist and is a rabid nationalist. In his speech in Katowice, Golik stressed on a number of occasions that he was the only man in the Strasbourg parliament who seriously represented "Polish interests".

Samoobrona hides its right-wing political positions behind the formulation that it aims to achieve a "third way" between capitalism and communism. In Poland, Besancenot avoided any criticism of this right-wing slogan, which was notoriously used by Mikhail Gorbachev to justify the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union. The word socialism did not appear in his speech. Instead Besancenot spoke about the NPA also

striving for a "third model," winning applause from the PPP delegates.

Besancenot's alliance with the Polish PPP is directly opposed to the development of a socialist perspective within the Polish working class, which is being increasingly radicalized by the devastating effects of the international economic crisis.

In 1980, the Solidarity movement demonstrated the enormous strength of the Polish workers' movement. Following the strike by workers in the port of Gdansk, a wave of workplace occupations took place, and within a short space of time 10 million workers organized themselves in the trade union Solidarity.

The Polish workers, however, lacked any independent political perspective. Decades of Stalinist repression had completely cut them off from the experiences of the Trotskyist movement, which had opposed Stalinism since 1923 on the basis of an internationalist and socialist program and perspective.

Leon Trotsky, the Left Opposition and later the Fourth International made absolutely clear the irreconcilable gulf between socialism and Stalinism. Stalin's bureaucratic regime was able to consolidate its rule in the Soviet Union in the 1930s only by physically destroying the Marxist opposition and organizing a political genocide against those who had led and defended the October Revolution.

The leadership of Solidarity eventually fell into the hands of right-wing elements close to the Catholic Church and accommodated itself to the Stalinist ruling clique in order to prepare the opening up of the country to capitalism. For workers, the result was a social disaster. Most of the factories and shipyards which had occupied in 1980 have since been shut down completely.

The precursor of the political party to which Olivier Besancenot belongs today had already played a major role in leading Polish workers into a dead end in 1980.

At the time, the LCR (Revolutionary Communist League - Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire), the predecessor of the NPA, and its affiliated international organization, the Pabloite United Secretariat led by Ernest Mandel, still postured as adherents of Trotskyism, although they had in fact long before rejected the program of the Fourth International, adapting themselves to Stalinism, social democracy and bourgeois nationalism. The LCR's lip service to Trotskyism, however, was useful in deceiving Polish workers, who knew that Trotsky was a bitter opponent of Stalinism.

The Pabloites cheered on Lech Walesa, adapted to his nationalist perspective and supported the forces which would pave the way to capitalist restoration. They described Jacek Kuron, a leading member of the Stalinist student federation, who in 1964 in an "Open Letter to the Party" had called for the overthrow of the bureaucracy, as a "Trotskyist", although his own estimation of Stalinism had nothing in common with the analysis made by Trotsky.

Kuron went on to become a leading political adviser of Lech Walesa. He strictly opposed the overthrow of the Stalinist regime by workers and relied on negotiations and co-operation with the government in Warsaw. During the period of capitalist restoration, Kuron sat together with representatives of the government at a so-called round table in order to organize a smooth handover of state power and prevent any independent intervention by the working class.

Between 1989 and 1993, Kuron held the post of Minister for Social and Labor Affairs (with a short interruption) and was directly responsible for implementing the social and political attacks required to achieve capitalist restoration. Kuron is just one of many right-wing politicians who emerged from the Solidarity movement. The lack of a Trotskyist perspective in the upsurge of the 1980s had devastating consequences for the Polish working class.

Besancenot is continuing the treacherous work begun by the United Secretariat in 1980. Once again, the task is to derail a powerful social movement. However, today Besancenot regards the label of Trotskyism as a hindrance. While in 1980 the Pabloites sought to portray Walesa and Kuron as consistent opponents of Stalinism, today the job is to suppress any discussion whatsoever of the lessons of 1980 and the role of

Stalinism. Any mention of Trotsky would inevitably raise these questions.

At its founding congress, the NPA decided to strip from its program any reference to the history and perspectives of the Fourth International. The collapse of the Soviet Union has ended an entire epoch, Besancenot repeats continuously. This, according to his political outlook, renders irrelevant all the experiences of the twentieth century. Today all that is needed is to select "the best" features from various political traditions—Stalinist, Maoist, reformist, anarchist and syndicalist—i.e., a completely chaotic jumble.

Neither the Polish nor the international working class, however, can make a step forward without drawing the lessons from the events of the 1980's and the role of Stalinism. The monstrous crimes committed by Stalinism in the name of socialism are used as ammunition to this day by all the opponents of socialism and are a huge source of confusion in the working class in Eastern Europe. The real aim of Besancenot's trip to Katowice was to prevent any clarification of such confusion and to strengthen the hand of those reactionary forces that are once again preparing to lead Polish workers into a nationalist blind alley.



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