

French “anti-capitalist” Olivier Besancenot justifies collaboration with reformists and Polish nationalists

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Olivier Besancenot, the leading candidate of the French New Anticapitalist Party (NPA—*Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste*), held a press conference in Tournai, Belgium, May 22, as part of a European tour. WSWs reporters attended and asked Besancenot pointed questions about his recent appearance in Poland.

Following trips to Spain and Portugal, Besancenot spoke May 16 at a gathering in Katowice organised by the Polish Party of Labour (PPP—*Polska Partia Pracy*). The PPP works closely with the “August 80” trade union and includes within its ranks openly nationalist elements, including supporters of the former Polish dictator Józef Pilsudski and ex-functionaries of the right-wing populist party, *Samobrona* (Self-Defence of the Republic of Poland).

One of the main speakers at the PPP congress in Katowice, alongside Besancenot, was Bogdan Golik, the vice-chairman of the Polish Chamber of Commerce. Golik was elected to the European parliament on the *Samobrona* list five years ago and now sits in the social democratic group. Golik is currently one of the PPP’s leading candidates for the European election. 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.”

Besancenot’s appearance with such reactionary figures makes clear that the NPA is not only prepared to collaborate with social democratic and reformist forces, it is also ready to work together with overtly nationalist tendencies.

When asked by the WSWs at the Tournai press

conference last Friday about his readiness to collaborate with right-wingers like Golik, Besancenot justified his participation at the PPP congress in Katowice while seeking to cover up Golik’s nationalist positions. “I saw no right-wing nationalists,” Besancenot claimed. “We discussed with anti-capitalist internationalists.”

The WSWs then asked Besancenot to explain how it was that the NPA claims to reject political collaboration with the French Socialist Party (PS) although it was well known that Golik was a member of the Party of European Socialists alongside the PS.

Visibly irritated by the question, Besancenot replied: “The PPP made an alliance with this Euro MP. Pick up your telephone and ask the PPP yourself. If you’re asking me for his CV [résumé], I can’t answer. He’s not our ally. I heard him speak, I heard his speech, the reasons for leaving that [previous] group and on what grounds.”

Besancenot then claimed that Golik “does not figure in the Coordination of the Anticapitalist Left we’re talking about.... The PPP has its relationships and alliances.”

He continued: “I make no excuses for my presence at that convention.... I don’t go to other countries to give out good and bad marks.”

Besancenot was obviously rattled by the questions raised by the WSWs team. However, his claim of ignorance with regard to the political activities and history of Bogdan Golik is implausible.

The NPA (or its predecessor, the *Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire*—LCR) has established close links with the Polish Party of Labour in recent years. In 2006, the president of the PPP and its affiliated “August 80”

trade union, Boguslaw Zietek, gave an interview to the journal published by the LCR's international tendency, *International Viewpoint*.

In that interview, Zietek expressed agreement with a position advanced by Besancenot at the NPA founding conference in February 2009—i.e., that history and political traditions have no role to play when it comes to selecting political allies. Speaking on behalf of the PPP, Zietek also stressed the importance of collective amnesia: “We reject the artificial historic divisions founded on what people did before 1989. If someone wants to do some good for Poland today, it isn't important that they belonged in the past to the governing party or the opposition.”

Zietek spoke at an LCR conference held in Paris in 2008. Despite Zietek's and Besancenot's pleas for an amnesty for political betrayals committed in the past, both men are experienced political figures. Besancenot's latest assurance that he is not aware of the right-wing political background of such a leading PPP figure as Golik simply beggars belief.

In any event, more important than Besancenot's attitude toward Golik is his crass opportunism and national outlook. First, it is absurd to suggest that the PPP's leading candidate “does not figure in the Coordination of the Anticapitalist Left we're talking about,” the NPA's centrist amalgamation, which involves the PPP.

And what of the argument that Besancenot doesn't travel to other countries “to give out good and bad marks”? Is there any party, no matter how right-wing, that he would not give a “bad mark” to? This is simply national philistinism and a green light for alliances with the most dubious forces.

Besancenot made clear at his Belgian press conference that the NPA's attitude towards collaboration with European social-democratic and reformist parties was entirely of a tactical nature. On the issue of working together with organisations such as the German or French Left Party, Besancenot stressed: “These are questions of tactics, an issue to be settled at a European level when we talk of independence from social-democracy.... We extend to them [the German and French Left Parties] a fraternal hand saying that we accept our differences. It is a tactical discussion. We have no adversaries in that camp. Let us respect each other. Let us go forward in

the struggle with the concrete experience of the facts.”

The essentially nationalist perspective of the NPA was already revealed at its founding congress where party delegates rejected the proposal for the Socialist United States of Europe in favour of the vague formula “A Europe of the workers and the peoples.” This slogan was repeated by a number of speakers at the press conference in Tournai.

Besancenot's appearance in Katowice and his justification for the NPA's collaboration with the PPP at the subsequent press conference should be taken as a serious warning. As the current crisis deepens in Europe, the New Anticapitalist Party will cooperate with all sorts of forces to head off a genuinely independent movement of the working class.

The author recommends:

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