

The French radical “left” chases after social democracy

Francis Dubois, Pierre Mabut
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The reaction by the “far left”—the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) of Olivier Besancenot and Lutte Ouvrière—and the Left Party of Jean-Luc Mélenchon to the debacle of social democracy in the June 7 European elections is a further move to the right, under the guise of “left unity.” Despite all their criticism of the social-democratic Socialist Party for its “neo-liberalism,” these parties are desperately clinging to this pro-capitalist party.

As for the Socialist Party (Parti Socialiste, PS), it reacted to its historically low vote by embarking on a joint campaign with the conservative Modem party of François Bayrou in the upcoming regional elections of 2010.

The European elections left the PS with just 16.5 percent of the vote, unable to contest the highly unpopular governing Union for a Popular Movement (Union pour un Mouvement Populaire, UMP) of President Nicolas Sarkozy, which obtained 28 percent. With 60 percent of voters abstaining, the PS has lost any support it once had in the working class. This has not shaken the confidence of the NPA in its designation of the PS as part of the “left.” The NPA covers for the trade union betrayals of workers interests, so its outstretched hand to the PS (which has close ties to most unions), is not surprising. The NPA has set itself the goal of uniting the whole of the “left” around a program of reformist illusions, the very thing that has prevented any opposition to Sarkozy’s destruction of jobs and social gains.

A joint statement issued by the NPA and the Left Party June 30 on alliances in the regional elections in 2010 makes it clear that they would both ally with the PS: “In the second round, the lists supported by the Left Party and the NPA will fight for the left [that includes the PS] to win and prevent the regions going over to the right. For this, the two organisations right now declare their support for ‘technical’ or ‘democratic’ amalgamations of left lists with the exception of excluding any agreement including the Modem [right-wing party led by François Bayrou].”

In spite of all the NPA’s rhetoric about remaining independent of the Socialist Party due to the latter’s pro-capitalist policies, the above agreement can only mean support for the PS, which controls 21 of the 22 regions of metropolitan France. This is an historic betrayal of workers’ interests, attempting to tie them politically to the PS and its satellite parties.

One week before the election, in an interview in *Libération*, NPA leader Olivier Besancenot reiterated his appeal to the discredited bourgeois left. “The massive resistance to the

government is experiencing a backwash,” he said, “notably because of a lack of trade union and left political unity.” He added, “When I hear Ségolène Royal (PS) say to workers at Molex and Arcelor [companies facing layoffs]: ‘A social Europe has need of you,’ I would say that they would need the PS, which has taken no measures to make this social Europe palpable.”

In a June 7 statement, immediately after the election, the NPA proposed “to all the anti-liberal and anti-capitalist left [meaning the Communist Party and the Left Party] a valid long-term agreement for the forthcoming social and political agenda, to encourage the convergence of struggles, more than ever necessary.”

NPA leader Olivier Besancenot was more explicit on June 22 about his wooing of the PS. “We would like to come together with it [PS] in the struggles,” he said. “The all-or-nothing on the left is finished, but there is an intermediary step: the expression of disagreements on the field.”

Immediately after the election, the NPA reinforced its campaign for a “unity of the left.” On June 18, Besancenot said in the *Metro* newspaper, “The problem that is posed to all the social and political left today is: are we capable of uniting all our forces to stop the government in the weeks and months to come? We need a social victory of the CPE type experienced under Villepin. As long as we don’t have this, the government keeps the initiative.”

That the government keeps the “initiative” is entirely due to the trade unions working hand in glove with President Sarkozy. The NPA thus covers for the union bureaucracy.

The invocation of the CPE movement is fraudulent. The reference to a CPE type (first job contract) “victory” over Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin in 2006 (he was obliged to partly withdraw the legislation after the mass mobilisation of youth), turned out to be a victory for Sarkozy. He was then minister of the interior and arch rival of Villepin and of then President Jacques Chirac, and took the initiative in granting the concessions and organising the end of the mobilisations in alliance with the trade unions. He then went on to become the presidential candidate for the UMP, having sidelined Chirac and Villepin. Such “victories” are used to prevent the working class from drawing political lessons and from fighting for its independent interests.

For the NPA, the future of the working class depends on what the trade union bureaucracy and the “left”—in which it includes the Socialist Party—is prepared to do. It writes, “If the political and trade union left do not work together, we will never finish paying

for [the employers'] crisis." Since the political parties like the French Communist Party (Parti communiste français, PCF) and the newly formed Left Party (Parti de gauche, PG—a split from the Socialist Party) work closely with the PS, this is a call to these "left" forces that would be ready to enter a bourgeois-left government based on a pro-capitalist program.

To this end, the NPA is now petitioning this "left" to organise a general strike on the demand for "the banning of sackings." Because it has no perspective of a workers government based on a socialist program, this demand can only be understood as an appeal to Sarkozy and the trade unions, who are responsible for imposing the crisis on the working population.

The NPA has abandoned its reservations about the Left Front's continued alignment with the PS, even though its leaders Jean-Luc Mélenchon of the PG and Marie-George Buffet of the PCF both participated in recent bourgeois governments. The 6.1 percent of votes obtained by the Left Front ahead of the NPA's 4.9 percent has only pushed the latter into more desperate local manoeuvres for unity. It now intends to contest city elections in Aix-en-Provence on joint slates with the Left Front.

As for the so-called Left Front of the PCF and the Left Party, it is functioning as a go-between of the Socialist Party and the so-called "extreme left." Between 1981 and 2002 the PCF has been repeatedly in government with the Socialist Party, playing a crucial role in attacking workers' living standards.

Under the slogan "For another Europe," the Left Front went into the European elections on the basis of a vague program of protest against the predominant "neo-liberalism" of the European Union and for its reform in the sense of more financial regulation, more intervention into the economy by states at the national level and for a "more social Europe" on a capitalist basis.

The Left Party called the disastrous social-democratic vote a "dark reality." The Left Party and the PCF saw it as the cause of the "victory of the right wing" to which the working class was gravitating, while other sections were "abandoning political life."

The break-up of social democracy has also produced despair in the Independent Workers Party (Parti ouvrier indépendant, POI), which broke from Trotskyism in 1971. An editorial in the party's newspaper *Informations Ouvrières* by POI leader Daniel Gluckstein analysed the elections thus: "This June 7 showed the depth of the crisis of political democracy. The march towards the political dislocation of the parties—whose existence is an integral part of political democracy, in the same way as the trade unions—would not be a positive sign. The re-conquest of democracy is on the agenda.... If they do not want to continue the descent into hell, the parties that claim to be working class and for democracy have no other choice: they must break from any subordination to the European Union." The POI stood no candidates in the election for fear of legitimising the EU institutions and tarnishing its nationalist credentials.

Not only does the POI fear the break-up of social democracy, but it wants to save bourgeois democracy at the expense of a socialist reorganisation of society. And instead of international workers' solidarity the POI espouses crude nationalism against the EU. Like the NPA, the POI is also appealing for a "unity of the left" in a joint campaign to "ban sackings."

The reaction of the Lutte Ouvrière group to the results of the election, in which it obtained 1.22 percent, was to virtually ignore the collapse of social democracy in Europe. Its leader Arlette Laguiller wrote, "Even in opposition the PS has nothing to say to exploited workers.... What will count is the capacity and will of workers to mobilize." This did not prevent LO joining the PS and PCF on joint slates for the municipal elections in March 2008.

As soon as the election was over, the Stalinists and their social democratic rescuers of the Left Party urged the setting up of a political instrument able to function as part of an alternative bourgeois "left" government. In his first speech after the election, Mélenchon called for the extension of the "Left Front" to a "Permanent Front" for all elections up to the presidential and parliamentary elections of 2012. He addressed this proposition to the "entire other left [all parties to the left of the PS]," namely "to the NPA, the Alternatives, Ecology Solidarity, AlterEkolo and to the bourgeois MRC (Republican Citizens Movement)."

He made clear that these alliances aim at bringing back bourgeois governments, including the social democrats, stating, "For these reasons, the Left Party advocates the constitution of autonomous slates of the Left Front, including all the other left [the parties of the radical middle class]. Such slates could be in the lead on the left and be instrumental in the election of new executives for our regions. If they couldn't achieve this they would obviously mobilize to beat the right wing in the second round and vote PS. They would, of course, for that, be ready to merge with the left slate in first place, and if the political conditions allow it, namely if this slate doesn't comprise representatives of the Modem."

Mélenchon and the PCF are firmly oriented towards the PS, which is a vital part of their political calculations. Mélenchon is furbishing reformist illusions by calling on the PS leadership to "solemnly change its orientation in severing its links with the European right wing and the liberal policies that these imply."

The PS needs the Left Front and the "far left" in order to survive as the main opposition party. The mutual dependency of social democracy and the radical "left" was expressed by former PS national secretary François Hollande, who stated, "A weak PS, and it's the whole left that suffers."



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