

France: New Anti-capitalist Party tries to channel worker discontent with the unions

Anthony Torres, Alex Lantier**21 October 2009**

The impotence of the demonstrations organized by the trade unions last spring against government policy, and the defeat of the strikes against plant closures as a result of the financial crisis, have provoked a wave of mass opposition to the trade unions and political parties in France. Inside the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA), whose leadership refuses to make any criticism of the CGT (General Confederation of Labour, France's largest union, close to the Communist Party), some minority factions are attempting to channel this discontent. This is the case with the Prometheus Collective and the Clear Tendency, connected with the Argentinean PTS (Socialist Workers Party).

Their position, which reflects above all the NPA's support for the unions, is distinguished by its lack of political perspective and its basic incoherence. Obsessed by the organisation of trade union demonstrations, they paradoxically propose repeating the same type of initiative that they criticised in the first place.

In its statement "Priority to a fighting programme of unity," the Prometheus group criticises the trade unions' January 29 and March 15 days of action: "The 'policy of unity' of the eight confederations and their January 5 platform of demands, after the UMP's symbolic victory in the European elections, opened wide the doors for the policies of the government and the capitalist class."

It adds, "The working class and the youth, faced with an offensive by the capitalist class, went into this period with weak, dispersed organisations for the most part intending to collaborate with the president."

This is a reference to the fact that the unions organised days of action at long intervals against President Nicolas Sarkozy's policies, after having consulted with him and his representatives on what policy they were going to adopt in many tripartite meetings and negotiations. This enabled the unions to sap the resistance of the workers in struggle against austerity policies and the bank rescue packages, while claiming to be mobilising their forces. The studied silence kept by the "left" parties such as the NPA played a central role in this anti-working class masquerade.

In its September 2009 issue, which contains a large number of criticisms of the leadership of the CGT by union

representatives, Clear Tendency denounces "the abandonment and treacherous line of the trade unions." It continues, stating that the union leaderships "boycotted the demonstration called by the New Fabris workers July 31 at Châtellerault and refused to support workers being prosecuted in the courts."

Clear Tendency also criticises the tribute in the July 30 *Nouvel Observateur* paid by NPA leader Alan Krivine to Maurice Grimaud, the former Paris police chief during the 1968 strikes. Krivine presented him as "a good bloke" and "a left republican."

Clear Tendency commented, "It is more than worrying that Alain Krivine should strike the pose, like Cohn-Bendit, of the veteran fighter who knew where to draw the line. To assert that 'we knew how far we should not go,' that is to give the idea that we were the sort of 'reasonable' people that Grimaud could count on to contain the movement."

Indeed, this is precisely the message Krivine sends with his praise for the police: the leadership of the NPA is on the side of law and order.

These articles, coming from within the NPA, amount to a devastating admission about the political orientation of the party. Struggles have been betrayed, organised with no perspective of being won, and workers have been left on their own, confronted with trade union and political organisations that were hostile to them. The old conceptions, advanced by the media, according to which the CGT is "militant" and the NPA "revolutionary," were lies in the service of the bourgeoisie.

On what basis, then, do Prometheus and Clear Tendency want to construct a new programme for the workers?

The Prometheus Collective proposes the creation of "unitary committees" involving all the organisations—political parties, trade unions, associations. It proposes to recycle an old slogan of the NPA and its predecessor, the Ligue communiste révolutionnaire (LCR)—"make sackings illegal."

The slogan for "the banning of sackings" immediately rings false. No perspective is developed to give an orientation to workers in a revolutionary struggle that could impose such a fundamental constraint on the privileges of the bourgeoisie and the prerogatives of the state. To propose such an initiative in "unitary" committees, bringing together bourgeois state parties such as the French Communist Party (PCF) and the Left Party

(PG), and even the Socialist Party (PS), is ludicrous.

Prometheus calls for “unitary collectives for the illegalisation of sacking (collectives which must decide on everything, slogans, documents, material, the dates of meetings and demonstrations) and the organisation of a national demonstration (this to be decided on collectively).” So, having started off criticising the political impotence of trade union days of action, Prometheus ends up proposing yet another.

As for Clear Tendency, it too proposes a “national demonstration against sackings,” pointing out that the NPA leadership had defended this demand “in the first quarter.” The main proposal of Clear Tendency is to put forward the setting up of “an inter-union tendency.” This “should assemble class struggle teams beyond the different political affiliations”—that is, representing all the parties.

We glimpse a party impatient with its own opportunism, which is caught up in its incoherence—proposing to continue with trade union pseudo-protests while at the same time denouncing the effects of this policy in order to cover the left flank of the party from the workers.

Workers find themselves in a difficult political situation, betrayed by the whole mechanism of the trade unions and the political parties that have dominated 20th Century French politics. What is indispensable for the workers is the building of a new mass revolutionary party resolutely hostile to the trade unions and existing parties, which can give a perspective to workers in a global struggle for power. The struggle for Trotskyism, that is, for the continuity of the Marxists’ revolutionary struggles, is the essential element of all working class politics.

Born last February with the call to put Trotskyism “behind it,” which it characterised as “old-fashioned,” the NPA can neither transform itself into a revolutionary party nor build one. Even the critics of the NPA leadership merely propose more one-off demonstrations, which are fundamentally in line with the official strategy of the government: the boosting of the economy through enormous transfers of taxpayers’ money to the banks and big business.

Prometheus and Clear Tendency’s lack of critical independence in relation to bourgeois public opinion stands out in their treatment of the Iranian crisis after the re-election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in June 2009. The defeated candidate, Mirhossein Mousavi, mobilised the urban middle class in demonstrations with the backing of the clerical elite, including Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. They wanted to carry out a policy of liberalisation of the economy and opening it up to US and EU imperialism, which is at present occupying two of Iran’s neighbours, Iraq and Afghanistan.

The NPA calls Mousavi “a democrat,” as does French diplomacy, and claims that the protest movements are made up of workers aspiring to democracy. On this issue, there is no real difference between the analysis of Prometheus and Clear Tendency and that of the NPA and French imperialism.

In a June 24 article, Prometheus condemns without proof the election of Ahmadinejad: “The Iranian people go into the streets to say ‘no’ to the results, rigged by the Ahmadinejad clique, and for its vote to be respected; that is for respect for democracy, which is incompatible with the dictatorship.”

Prometheus describes Mousavi’s movement thus: “A powerful wave which comes from afar, a whole people on the streets, a government which cannot dominate as before, there we have the ingredients of a revolution that is beginning.” The fact that this would be “a revolution” aiming to impose an imperialist yoke on the Iranian people, surrounded on all sides by NATO armies, seems to escape Prometheus.

In its June issue, Clear Tendency even explains that the pro-Mousavi movement was “favourable to an economic opening-up and to the ‘normalisation’ of relations with imperialism so as to develop its own businesses.” However, Clear Tendency proposes that the workers should participate in this movement, hoping eventually to spark off a “self-organisation process” in their workplaces.

As if Total or ExxonMobil, having pillaged Iraq’s oil, would have agreed to share Iran’s resources with the Iranian workers once Mousavi had negotiated his deals with the West’s governments and corporations!

The Iranian context clearly exposes the reactionary content of the attempts to mobilise workers in demonstrations without perspectives and behind whatever organisations. Having helped Sarkozy’s reactionary reforms in France, the effect of the politics of Prometheus and Clear Tendency in Iran would be an even more blatant capitulation to the interests of imperialism. Whatever vocabulary—tinged with Marxist phraseology—is utilised, these “revolutionaries” are hanging onto the coattails of the CGT, the Elysée and the Quai d’Orsay.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:
wsws.org/contact