

The NPA and France's political-financial scandals

Pierre Mabut, Alex Lantier
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France's political-financial scandals present a striking contrast that demands explanation. On the one hand, there is the high rank of the main defendants—ex-President Jacques Chirac, ex-Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin, and ex-Interior Minister Charles Pasqua—and the seriousness of the underlying crimes: the illegal funding of France's murderous stooge regimes in Africa and massive kickbacks in international weapons sales. Objectively, these trials constitute an indictment of French imperialism.

On the other hand, the bulk of the charges against the defendants are minor and technical. Chirac is charged with illegally funding a few dozen jobs for political appointees as mayor of Paris, and Villepin is charged with considering a plot to slander current President Nicolas Sarkozy with faked bank records. No one has risen to protest what is, in effect, a cover-up of the real crimes.

The near-total silence of France's "far left" parties is, in this regard, particularly notable. It goes to the heart of the political situation: none of the establishment parties, including those on the "far left" who claim to defend working class interests, mounts a serious struggle against imperialism.

After keeping quiet during the Clearstream trial, the *Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste* (New Anti-Capitalist Party—NPA) of Olivier Besancenot published a November 2 leaflet titled "Chirac, Pasqua, Villepin, Sarkozy ... heave-ho, all that into the trash!"

The style is the man, Buffon said, and the NPA's style is empty bluster. This begins with the leaflet's title. In presenting the disgrace of President Nicolas Sarkozy as an imminent prospect, the NPA seems to forget a key aspect of the scandals: Sarkozy is not a defendant in any of them! Far from being in legal danger, Sarkozy stands to benefit from the disgrace of his rivals in the conservative UMP (*Union pour un Mouvement Populaire*).

The NPA's analysis of the scandals is perfunctory. Pasqua "benefited from illegal payments from weapons sales to Angola." Chirac "will finally have to answer to justice for the affair of the bogus jobs at Paris city hall, which is emblematic of the 'RPR system'"—the RPR being the UMP's predecessor. As for the Clearstream trial against Villepin, the NPA describes it as "an affair incomprehensible to average mortals, from which we will only remember that Villepin and Sarkozy accused each other of using the worst underhanded maneuvers."

The NPA draws two conclusions: firstly, that "the right wing is now affected and discredited by its policies," and secondly that "something is rotten in the institutions." The source of the rot, the

NPA says, is "the Fifth Republic"—the current constitutional regime, set up by General Charles de Gaulle in 1958. The NPA describes it as "the reign of the opaque, of privilege, of dealmaking of all types," calling for "ending the personal power of the presidency."

What emerges from the NPA leaflet is a very simplistic view of the scandals: some individual conservative politicians abused their personal powers. This blinkered view of events, one might note, is not so different from that which Sarkozy's political allies might take. It also conveniently hides the complicity in these crimes of the *Parti socialiste* (PS) and *Parti Communiste Français* (PCF), with whom the NPA is developing political ties.

The "far left", Clearstream, and the rise of Sarkozy

The NPA's careless approach to the scandals reflects more, however, than the ignorance and lack of curiosity of its writers. It arises from their objective complicity, both in terms of tactics and broader perspective, with the cover-up and exploitation of the affairs.

This is perhaps the clearest in the Clearstream affair, whose investigations began in 2006. At that point, Sarkozy charged that Villepin had hatched a plot to slander him by allowing fake Clearstream account listings bearing his name to be given to investigating judges. These judges were studying corruption charges in the Taiwan frigates sale scandal, which had emerged from the Elf Affair involving corruption in the French and African oil industry.

This move came amid a broader crisis facing the government of Chirac and Villepin. Their foreign policy was in tatters after the 2005 rejection of the European constitution referendum, and popular opposition to their social policy had provoked a series of mass strikes. As the bourgeoisie sought a way out, charges related to the Clearstream affair became ammunition for Sarkozy to fashion a new political consensus around himself, on the basis of a more pro-US foreign policy and greater collaboration with the trade unions.

Repeated police raids for the Clearstream investigation hit the defense ministry, the headquarters of France's intelligence services, and the headquarters of defense and aerospace firm

EADS. Villepin and Chirac were forced to withdraw their social cuts and accept Sarkozy's presidential candidacy in 2007 (after which he proceeded to push pension cuts and anti-worker legal reforms at least as drastic as Chirac's 2006 proposals).

Sarkozy could pursue this policy because he counted on his "far left" helpmates to keep the ongoing strike movement and subsequent legal investigations within definite limits. Lacking real political leadership, the 2006 strike movement was wound down by the trade unions.

Sarkozy would go on to handily win the 2007 presidential elections. It is worth noting that, during that election campaign, Sarkozy returned the favor to the "far left." When the *Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire* (the NPA's predecessor) needed signatures of local officials to get on the ballot, Sarkozy declared on public television: "Besancenot, I can't say he's close to me, he represents the far left. I think it would be too bad if a man like Besancenot could not participate in the presidential competition." Ultimately, the LCR got the signatures it needed, in part from officials of the right-wing MoDem of François Bayrou.

During the 2006 crisis, amid what it called a "political maelstrom shaking the summits of the state," *Le Monde* interviewed Alain Krivine, the leader of the LCR, and Georges Kaldy of Lutte Ouvrière (Workers' Struggle, LO). When *Le Monde* asked if either organization was calling for the resignation of the government over the Clearstream affair, Kaldy and Krivine both said no.

The two "far left" leaders, as it turned out, did not view the crisis as particularly significant. Kaldy claimed: "In the workplaces, people do not care about this affair, which no one understands." LO's paper baldly asked "what importance for workers" such affairs could have.

Trade-union cretinism versus proletarian internationalism

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The fact that the "far left" could pose such a stupid question—in effect, whether the crimes of French imperialism have significance for workers—reflects a broad, noxious culture promoted by decades of domination of left politics by the PS and PCF. Armed with petty provincialism and an unshakeable faith in the reformability of the state, this milieu considers it best not to raise imperialism with workers—or, as the NPA condescendingly writes, "the average mortal." For them, workers should leave international questions to the blessed few—bourgeois immortals like Chirac and Pasqua!

This syndicalist cretinism is the polar opposite of proletarian internationalism, which insists that the working class must come to power in a revolutionary, globally-coordinated struggle for socialism. The French "far left's" indifference to foreign policy is a significant part of its hostility to Marxist politics.

This hostility found more explicit expression in the NPA's February 2009 founding congress, in which the LCR dissolved itself and formally severed its tenuous association to

Trotskyism—which it described as "old-fashioned." Reborn as the NPA, the LCR was seeking a further integration into the political establishment. It led a series of negotiations with the Left Front, consisting of the PCF and a split-off of the PS named the Left Party, with a view to forming electoral alliances for regional elections in 2010 and the presidential elections of 2012.

Given the historical record of these parties, the NPA cannot tolerate a thorough exposure of the historical crimes of French imperialism. As a brief review of France's post-war history shows, this would shatter the parties with whom the NPA is seeking to develop alliances.

The PCF and Socialist betrayal of revolutionary struggle at the time of the Liberation from the Nazis set the stage for nearly two decades of colonial wars. With PCF and Socialist ministers sitting in government, workers' councils in factories and armed resistance groups in France were disbanded or folded into the bourgeois state. With the home front against the working class secured, the bourgeoisie felt free to send troops back into French Indochina in 1945. This set the stage, with the 1946 French bombardment of Haiphong, for France's eight-year Indochina War.

The PCF and the Socialists also actively participated in French imperialism's war against the Algerian masses. The PCF supported Socialist Premier Guy Mollet's pursuit of the war under the slogan of keeping the colony in the "French Union," voting him "special powers" to put down the revolt in 1956. When de Gaulle returned to power in 1958 amid a mounting crisis in the French bourgeoisie over how to handle the Algerian war, the PCF quickly abandoned its criticisms of de Gaulle's vague plans for Algerian "self-determination." This was the most direct token of the PCF's support for de Gaulle's regime, until the PCF's sell-out over the general strike of May-June 1968.

The Trotskyist movement led opposition to the betrayals of France's "left" parties, winning a substantial hearing among workers in France and abroad, notably in Indochina.

The partial maintenance after 1968 of French imperialism's links to its ex-colonies is the social basis of the current scandals. The 1981-1995 presidency of the PS' François Mitterrand, who ruled with PCF support, oversaw most of the crimes that form the background of the Clearstream affair—the Elf Affair and the Taiwan frigate sales—and the corrupt Angola weapons sales.

The NPA's silence on the political-financial affairs is a politically-motivated attempt to hide from the working class both the lessons of history and the perspectives of Marxism.



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