French NPA covers for military escalation in Afghanistan

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There is no clearer demonstration of how France's *Nouveau Parti Anti-capitaliste* (NPA) confuses and demoralizes the workers than the NPA's response to US and NATO plans for a military escalation in Afghanistan.

The escalation is bitterly unpopular in France. An Ifop poll shows 82 percent opposition to additional troop deployments and 65 percent opposition to the military presence in Afghanistan. However, the war has the full support of the political establishment, including bourgeois left parties such as the *Parti Socialiste* (PS) and *Parti Communiste Français* (PCF). The PS and PCF were in power in 2001, and oversaw France's initial troop deployments to Afghanistan at the time.

The Afghan deployment is crucial not only to French strategic and corporate influence in an oil-rich, geopolitically critical region, but also to France's relations with its NATO allies, especially the US. At a debate on Afghanistan in the French National Assembly on December 16, French Defense Minister Hervé Morin made clear the only topic for debate would be the character of France's escalation. He laid out three options: "increasing our development assistance," "helping train police and the army," and "sending further military forces." He said that the decision would be taken after the international Afghan conference, to be held next January in London.

French forces recently launched a major offensive coordinated with US and Afghan troops in the Uzbin Valley east of Kabul, near the Pakistani border. This is the region in which 10 French soldiers were killed in an ambush last August. So far, there are no publicly available estimates of civilian or military causalities.

Under these conditions, the NPA would discredit itself if it openly supported the war or the record of its PCF allies—and thus lose all usefulness to its masters in the ruling class. As a result, it issues toothless criticisms of the war, implying that the war can be stopped through street protests.

In a December 17 statement published immediately after the parliamentary debate, the NPA wrote: "How can we place the slightest trust [in the strategy of Afghanisation of the war], since it is precisely the failure of this so-called Afghanisation strategy that forces the US and their NATO allies to push ahead in an endless military escalation?"

It added: "This dirty war is a dead end. Billions will be swallowed in military expenditures that will only bring profits to the armaments trusts." It concluded: "It is necessary that there be largest possible expression, in particular in the streets, of the majority's condemnation of this military adventure."

One must speak frankly. The war in Afghanistan is a vital strategic interest of every imperialist power, and cannot be stopped by a few street protests. Those who wish to stop the Afghan war must discuss the perspectives for organizing a mass, international working-class movement to bring down the governments of the NATO countries, including that of French President Nicolas Sarkozy.

What the NPA means when it speaks of giving expression to opposition "in the streets" is impotent trade-union protests like those that failed to halt the passage of Sarkozy's massive pension cuts in 2007-2008. These protests were carefully organized in conjunction with Sarkozy himself, in order to give the impression that Sarkozy was listening to popular opposition as he formulated his reactionary cuts. During these protests, the NPA carefully abstained from any criticism of the conscious treachery of the trade unions, especially the *Confédération Générale du Travail* (CGT, General Confederation of Labor),

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historically associated to the Stalinist PCF.

Under these conditions, the NPA's denunciations of the Afghan war as "dirty" and a source of profits for weapons manufacturers are empty and hypocritical. They contain not a trace of a Marxist understanding of the class character of the war, or of the dangers it poses to the international working class.

There can be no doubt that the war will protect the handsome profits of France's military-industrial complex, and French energy companies active in Central Asia. However, the broader goal of the war is to maintain the US' hegemonic position in Eurasia, and the cohesion of the European bourgeoisie's alliance with the US through NATO, under conditions of massive economic crisis. It is not a financial interest of one or another branch of French industry, but a strategic interest of the entire French and European bourgeoisie.

This accounts for the political establishment's unanimity in supporting France's military deployment to Afghanistan. In this, the NPA plays a slightly more complex and hypocritical role as the defenders of the establishment's left flank.

The pro-imperialist policy of the NPA emerged clearly in the June 2009 Iranian election, in which incumbent President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was re-elected. The NPA adopted without any proof the claims of the major imperialist powers, that the Iranian election result was rigged. It supported defeated candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi, who mobilized the urban middle class in demonstrations on a program of carrying out sweeping social cuts, the privatization of state enterprises, and opening up Iran to foreign investment.

The hypocrisy of the NPA's anti-war stance is underlined by its cooperation with the bourgeois left parties that started France's intervention in Afghanistan in 2001. Having renounced any formal association with Trotskyism at its founding congress this February, the NPA is rapidly deepening its ties to the PS, PG (the Left Party, a split-off from the PS) and the PCF. In the March 2010 regional elections, the NPA has already signaled that it would call for a PS vote in the second round of the elections and participate in PS-run regional administrations.

The PS and PCF groups in the National Assembly have hypocritically called for "the withdrawal of NATO forces." This is largely an attempt to disorient popular opposition to the US-led war in the lead-up to the London conference, which will aim to give a UN fig leaf for the continued occupation of Afghanistan. Thus PCF deputy Jean-Paul Lecoq proposed the strengthening the role of the UN with the definition of a new mandate for war, saying France should "take the initiative to organize a conference to define the conditions of peace in Afghanistan."

The more forthright voices in these parties have openly stated their support for military escalation. In his blog on December 15, the PS' Manuel Valls wrote: "My position is clear: the sending of supplementary soldiers is a necessity." He added: "The war waged in Afghanistan is not America's war, but that of the international community against one of the major centers of terrorism. Leaving Afghanistan now, because of obstacles we face and the growing disquiet of public opinion, would be disastrous." Echoing Obama's Nobel speech, he wrote: "The essential point is indeed to win the war so we can win the peace."

The orientation of the NPA towards France's bourgeois left parties is reprising the role of its Italian co-thinkers, the Pabloite organization Sinistra Critica. They participated in the Italian Stalinist Rifondazione Communista, which was a major component of Prodi government between 2006 and 2008. Rifondazione helped Prodi implement austerity measures against the working class, increasing troop deployments to Afghanistan and approving the expansion of US military bases.

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