

French regional elections: NPA defends Socialist Party

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20 March 2010

The reaction of France's *Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste* (NPA) to the March 14 first-round regional elections underlines its treacherous support for the bourgeois "left" parties, led by the opposition *Parti Socialiste* (PS). Despite the PS' record and its public advocacy of social cuts during the election campaign, the NPA is calling on voters to support the PS, under the guise of political solidarity against the right.

In tomorrow's second round, voters will elect the regional councils that run France's 22 regional administrations. Since the first round, the PS has formed an electoral alliance with Europe-Ecology and the Left Front—a coalition of the Stalinist *Parti Communiste Français* (PCF) and the Left Party of former PS minister Jean-Luc Mélenchon—in all regions except Bretagne, Picardie and the Limousin. This alliance is widely seen as preparation for the 2012 presidential elections.

Speaking the night of the first round, NPA spokesman Olivier Besancenot called on voters to "inflict the largest possible defeat to the lists supported by [President Nicolas] Sarkozy and the [ruling conservative] UMP" (Union for a Popular Movement).

Besancenot said that he supported the PS even though it would not oppose Sarkozy's austerity politics: "It is an absolute necessity to punish the right, even if we think that, just as in past years, future left majorities will not be a rampart against the politics of Sarkozy."

The NPA's vote has collapsed nationwide—from 6.1 percent in the 2009 European parliamentary elections to 2.4 percent in the first-round regional elections. It has advanced to the second round in only one region, the Limousin, thanks to its alliance with the Left Front. The NPA formed first-round electoral alliances with the Left Front in Limousin, Languedoc-Roussillon, and Pays-de-la-Loire.

The first round of voting, with a huge abstention rate of 54 percent, underlined that the broad masses are alienated from France's official political establishment. Under conditions where masses of people see no other political alternative, however, the PS is benefiting from popular anger against the austerity policies of Sarkozy and the UMP.

In this context, the role of the NPA is to ensure that no political alternative emerges in the working class. It cynically promotes the claim that the PS and its satellite parties like the PCF can be pressured to defend the interests of the working class—a position whose bankruptcy and implausibility is largely responsible for the NPA's electoral decline.

The PS is widely seen as a pro-business party not substantially different from the UMP, and which represent the interests of the banks. The PS led government under the presidency of François Mitterand (1981-1995) and the government of Prime Minister Lionel Jospin (1997-2002) implemented major cuts against the working class, devastating entire industries. In the current campaign, PS First Secretary Martine Aubry called for pension cuts.

The NPA's defense of the PS is particularly significant, as social-democratic governments in countries throughout Europe—Spain, Portugal, and Greece—move to slash living standards to pay for the bailouts and the economic collapse caused by the banks. These governments have pressed for wage freezes and cutbacks, multi-year increases in the retirement age, regressive tax increases aimed at working people, cuts in social spending, and other reactionary measures.

In Greece, ex-left groups such as SYRIZA and ANTARSYA all supported PASOK during the election

campaign last autumn. Since PASOK came to power, these parties have covered for it and promoted demonstrations organized by the trade unions on the bankrupt perspective of hoping to convince Papandreou and the banks to shift their policies. They play a critical role in the financial aristocracy's offensive against the living standards of the working class, defending and providing rationalizations for the leading bourgeois parties.

The Limousin—where the Left Front decided to run separately from the PS—is the only region where the NPA is present in the second round. The PS made an electoral alliance with the conservative MoDem of François Bayrou. The NPA's failure in its attempts to negotiate a joint campaign with the PS has become another avenue for the PS to pressure the NPA to take a more accommodating stance, and for the NPA to declare its loyalty to the bourgeois "left."

One example of this rhetoric was the March 18 statement of Alain Krivine, the long-time leader of the LCR (now the NPA), at his a meeting with Jean-Luc Mélenchon in Limousin. Speaking to an alliance of long-time Stalinist and social-democratic political operatives, Krivine wanted "to thank Nicolas Sarkozy and his politics of civil war, and the PS leadership who preferred the MoDem to the NPA, which allowed the NPA to gather together the true left in the Limousin."

Speaking on PS's refusal to accept the NPA-Left Front in its second-round Limousin list, PS deputy Jean-Christophe Cambadélis commented: "That's the NPA's problem. One cannot at the same time attack the PS at the national level and want to stay on a [regional] list with the PS."

On his part, outgoing president and head of PS list in Limousin explained: "I did not oppose the NPA's participation in the majority list, if it accepted responsibility for future policy. [...] However, I was not able to get clarity on the NPA's position."

After the failure of talks with the PS, the NPA blamed the PS. Stéphane Lajaumont, the NPA's Limousin spokesman, said that he had "made every effort but finally had no choice but maintain itself on the list, due wholly and exclusively to the PS federation of Haute-Vienne"—a *département* inside the Limousin region.

In a March 17 interview to the Stalinist newspaper *l'Humanité*, Christian Audouin, who heads the list of

the NPA-Left Front alliance, said the NPA had decided to participate in the PS-dominated administration: "This is a crude pretext advanced by the PS to provoke a disagreement. In this region, the NPA declared itself from the beginning in favor of participating in the management of regional affairs. All throughout its negotiations with the PS, the NPA has always insisted that it was ready to 'get its hands dirty.'"



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