

France: New Anti-Capitalist Party academic advocates surrender to Sarkozy's cuts

Alex Lantier

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On Saturday, *Le Monde*, France's daily newspaper of record, posted comments on the ongoing strike movement against President Nicolas Sarkozy's austerity policies by Philippe Corcuff, a university sociologist and member of the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA). Together with other "philosophers" quoted by *Le Monde*, Corcuff expressed his hostility to mass strike action against Sarkozy.

Le Monde's promotion of such forces is a calculated move, at a critical point in the struggle, to demoralize and disorient the strike movement.

Despite overwhelming popular support for expanding the strikes and protests against the cuts, the unions have put off all further national strike action until after Parliament passes Sarkozy's pension "reform." The determined action of oil and transport workers has resulted in a crippling gasoline shortage, but the unions are deliberately isolating their strikes.

Using the critical breathing space granted by the unions, Sarkozy is sending riot police to break up the picket lines and blockades of refinery workers, smashing strikes at Grandpuits, Fos and other workplaces.

Corcuff's reaction is a shameful capitulation to Sarkozy and the French ruling class. As workers face a political struggle against the state, Corcuff and his colleagues are intervening via *Le Monde* to advocate a policy of surrender.

Corcuff says that workers should focus on "playful" protest actions. He fears that if workers mount more forceful actions that are criticized in the press, "this could re-legitimize Sarkozy's discourse on security."

His proposal echoes the line of the General Confederation of Labor (CGT). The Stalinist-led CGT said it would mount only "symbolic" actions against the government's use of riot police to reopen the struck Grandpuits refinery near Paris.

Corcuff fully supports the unions' treachery. *Le Monde* warns that further economic shortages "will provoke a break with public opinion" quoting Corcuff: "The feeling of having public support is very important for union officials."

The reality is the opposite of the demoralized perspective of Corcuff. The situation is characterized by mass popular opposition to the cuts—70 percent according to recent polls—and overwhelming popular support for the strikes. The surest way to dissipate public support for the workers is to temporize and

show an unwillingness to take the fight all the way.

The opinion to which both Corcuff and the unions bow is not that of the broad public, but rather of the bourgeoisie and its media mouthpieces. This is not, however, primarily the result of a faulty analysis or misapprehension of the situation. On the contrary, the unions—and their acolytes in the NPA—are fully aware of the spreading mood of revolt in the working class, and they respond with fright and hostility. All of their efforts are concentrated on finding the best means of deflating the mass movement and suppressing it.

In another interview with *Le Monde*, Professor Cynthia Fleury more openly advocates the intervention of middle-class elements to end mass opposition to Sarkozy. According to *Le Monde*, Fleury specializes in theorizing "methods of regulating democracy"—or, to be more truthful, strangling it.

Bluntly asserting despite all evidence that the population "agrees with the final goal: the reform of pensions," she adds that "the street, which governs by its veto power," has emerged as a form of "negative sovereignty" whose control "is the great challenge facing modern democracy." Fleury concludes that "new democracy" could emerge from "the appearance of qualified majorities in the public debate, be it of trade union officials, professors, and so on."

She declares that opposition comes not from "the plebeians." "That is finished," she proclaims. "There aren't 'crowds,' there aren't 'masses,' there are educated and organized individuals who are a force for proposing policies."

Figures like Fleury and Corcuff speak for privileged and arrogant sections of the middle class, who view social opposition in the working class with contempt and fear. Convinced of the necessity of social cuts, they are bitterly hostile to working-class struggle against Sarkozy because they realize it would rapidly lead to a confrontation of the workers with the union bureaucracy. This would expose both the unions and the class-collaborationist politics of the NPA.

Indeed, Corcuff views the prospect of a working-class movement for a general strike independent of the unions with hostility and alarm. In his latest blog posting ("For durable and pacific social guerrilla warfare"), he explains: "The level of agreement and radicalization inside the national all-trade union alliance does not allow us to hope for the possibility of a call

for broad, lasting strikes. One may regret this, but one has to take this reality into account.”

Corcuff does not explain why the unions’ refusal to organize mass industrial action means that workers must follow the unions’ lead and abstain from organizing it themselves. Instead, he writes: “Is not the principal task preserving...the ineluctable cohabitation of the prudent and radical poles?”

Such comments expose the utter charlatanry of the New Anti-Capitalist Party. Any serious struggle against capitalism and the capitalist state entails a political struggle against advocates of class collaboration, like the CGT. However, Corcuff’s so-called “anti-capitalism” does not extend quite so far as this first prerequisite for a struggle against the profit system.

To be sure, Corcuff does not oppose using the phrase “general strike.” Only, he insists that a new and completely impotent meaning be attached to the term—so that even a right winger like Corcuff can use the term while giving interviews to the bourgeois press. For Corcuff, a general strike means “a demand for generalizing from concrete experiences.” He keeps any explanation of what this jargon means to himself.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has called for workers to form committees of action to coordinate independent strike activity against Sarkozy. The committees would work to unite all sections of the working population and broaden the struggle against austerity measures and unemployment, preparing the ground for a general strike to bring down the Sarkozy government and replace it with a workers government based on socialist policies.

Corcuff makes clear he opposes such a struggle. It would be “rigid,” he writes, to “consider the generalization of the strike to all workers, students and high school students at a given time as the only modality for building a convergent social movement capable of winning victories.” Instead, Corcuff “converges” back to his previous “modality” of demanding an alliance with right-wing forces: “a perspective of generalization presupposes at least keeping the most prudent and moderate sectors on the side of the mobilization.”

He recoils in horror from the “unity” and “centralization” of the class struggle, explaining: “This tends to crush the Multiple under the hegemony of the One.” He elaborates, in his own fashion: “Politics consists of creating a common space starting from human plurality that does not crush this plurality in the name of the One.”

All of this pseudo-intellectual blather reduces itself to the anxiety of more privileged sections of the middle class at the prospect of the emergence of the working class as a politically conscious and unified social force. This is what draws him inexorably to the trade union bureaucracy—another well-off layer of the middle class that sees the class struggle as a threat to its privileges.

Corcuff is not the only university “intellectual” in France who tries to confuse people with the jargon employed to put students to sleep in the classroom. He is, however, a specialist

in providing “left”-sounding formulas for opposing revolutionary struggle by the working class. The positions he advances underscore the significance of the NPA’s public repudiation of any, even verbal association with Trotskyism at its 2009 founding congress. This was a public acknowledgement of hostility to Marxism and the working class.

In a May 2009 article, “Anti-productivism and anti-capitalism: new convergences,” Corcuff described his attempt to work out an alliance between the NPA and forces around the ecologist Movement of Objectors to Economic Growth (MOC). The NPA ran several regional campaigns with the MOC in the March regional elections.

Corcuff’s article denounced economic production and called for an “anti-productivist cultural revolution.” Similarly, as strike struggles developed among French auto workers, the late NPA university philosopher Daniel Bensaïd described the automobile industry as “industrially decrepit and ecologically problematic.”

The deeply reactionary content of such views is reflected in Corcuff’s attacks on Marx for his alleged “productivist fascination.” The professor writes: “It’s not a question of abandoning entire sections of the Enlightenment creed—reason, science, or progress—but depriving them of their dominant and absolute position, making them only wagers in the face of ecological anxiety. It’s what I have elsewhere called the Blinkered Enlightenment.”

With his blinkered opposition to science, Marxism and the working class, Corcuff is part of the intellectual rearguard that social reaction maintains for use against the working class in times of crisis. In denouncing the general strike and advocating surrender to Sarkozy’s social cuts, he is playing his appointed role: a middle-class agent of the financial aristocracy.



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