

# France: Trade unions and bourgeois left parties pledge support for capitalist policies

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The main French trade unions met August 18 in the wake of the mini-European crisis summit held two days earlier in Paris between German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Nicolas Sarkozy. They issued a joint statement pledging to play their part with the government and the employers in “supporting growth, supporting employment and reducing the debt, while guaranteeing social cohesion.”

Prime Minister François Fillon invited the trade unions to participate in discussions to prepare the austerity measures that the government will announce August 24 to contain the contagion of the sovereign debt crisis spreading from Spain and Italy to France and threatening France’s AAA credit rating.

Discussion at the meeting on the development of eurobonds to replace national bonds, an idea that has been temporarily shelved, is part of plans to set up a dictatorship in Brussels to regulate the spending and budgets of all 17 governments of the eurozone on behalf of the banks.

The reactionary content of the measures proposed by Merkel and Sarkozy are revealed in a letter sent by the two after their meeting to Herman Rompuy, the president of the European Council. It outlined “Solidarity ... with conditions” and proposed “to increase pressure on the eurozone countries that did not do enough to balance their finances.” The letter also stated, “Payments from structural and cohesion funds should be suspended in the eurozone countries that did not conform with the recommendations on procedures with excessive deficits”, i.e., the poorest nations.

A Socialist Party (PS) statement criticised the summit from the right for the lack of urgency in setting up the bankers’ dictatorship, for the lack of “any real European solidarity” and the absence of the strengthening of the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF). François Hollande, frontrunner for PS presidential candidate in the 2012

elections and former first secretary of the PS, complained that Sarkozy had made “a big step backwards giving up on the creation of eurobonds” and that he had only made “a small step to ... the economic governance of the eurozone”.

The Attac organisation—a think tank comprised largely of academics who are members or ex-members of the Communist Party (PCF), the PS and the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA)—opined through its co-chair Aurélie Trouvé, “Of course we are pleased”. This is because Merkel and Sarkozy had mentioned a tax on financial transactions, the Tobin tax, a measure widely considered unworkable but a useful tool to avoid any serious consideration of challenging the capitalist profit system.

Christophe Aguiton, responsible for the international work of Attac-France, praised Sarkozy’s ex-minister Jean-Louis Borloo and the present finance minister. *Libération* reports that Aguiton asserted that Borloo had “judged that the moment was ‘historic’ for setting up [the Tobin tax], while Valérie Pécresse, the budget minister, had said on Friday that the European consensus for adopting it was ‘progressing’.”

Founded in France in December 1998—and establishing a worldwide network bringing together Stalinists, social democrats, nationalists and ex-radicals, operating through World Social Forums—Attac and its organisers stand exposed as supporters of European capitalism. Attac has consistently sought to put forward the Tobin tax on financial transactions as a remedy for reforming world capitalism without overthrowing it. In fact, the Tobin tax is a technical measure that can be publicly advocated by bourgeois governments, including Sarkozy’s, because they know that it will not be implemented and serves to provide them with a bit of pseudo-left cover. (See “Globalisation, Jospin and the political program of Attac”)

The role of the NPA in providing a left cover for the

bourgeois left is expressed in a piece by Isaac Johsua, a prominent contributor to the NPA web site and a member of Attac's Scientific Council. Published August 8, it is entitled, "The crisis: the moment of truth".

In some 10 pages of description of the economic crisis Johsua fails to take up the pro-capitalist politics of the Socialist Party or the betrayals of the trade unions. This is because for years his party has collaborated with them to head off struggles of the working class, most especially since the presidency of Sarkozy and the acceleration of the crisis.

Quoting from his book on the crisis, Johsua asserts: "States may intervene in the crisis, which they have been happy to do up to now. But who will save the states themselves if their economic credibility is threatened? They are the last rampart; after them there is nothing else."

His complete disregard of any role for the international working class, and glorification of the capitalist nation-state as the last bulwark, is consistent with his refusal to put forward any socialist perspective. In the section "What is to be done" he adopts the line of all bourgeois parties, "left" and right, particular those of Merkel and Sarkozy.

Johsua writes: "It is necessary—priority of priorities—to put out the fire of the debt. It is necessary—as an act of survival—to contain finance, prevent it from inflicting damage once and for all.... It is absolutely urgent to face up to the problem of public debt." He goes on to insist on the necessity to "reform as soon as possible the statutes of the ECB [European Central Bank] to enable the monetary financing of the public deficit..."

This "solution"—massive amounts of money-printing by the ECB to pay off government debts—was adopted to a significant degree by the ECB in 2009, when it gave hundreds of billions in cash to private banks to lend to European governments. However, this became only a further mechanism to enrich the banks and the wealthy at the expense of the working class, as the markets continued to press governments to repay their debts. Moreover, the inflationary effect of such policies inevitably eats into workers' wages.

He goes on to urge: "A big fiscal reform is imperative, to eliminate the tax breaks given to the bosses and to heavily tax high incomes, the profits of big business and the wealth of the rich ... Finance must be shackled." The fact that Johsua proposes such a bankrupt "solution" testifies to the

fact that he is unwilling to raise the only measure that can truly deal with the crisis: the massive confiscation of the assets of the super-rich.

At no point does he say who would take these measures, which would require the revolutionary overthrow by the working class of the capitalist governments of Europe on a socialist programme. He specifically rules out a consideration of socialism: "A break must be made with the model of free-market globalisation. This supposes many things that we cannot develop here... But what is indispensable, the foundation on which to build, is a new set-up for workers' wages ... a new share of surplus value, radically different from at present, to provide the basis of another development ... stabilise the labour market ... placing strict limits on sacking ... guarantee social gains, do away with austerity, restore public services worthy of the name."

In fact, Johsua's whole exercise is to create the conditions for the unions to stifle working class opposition to the bankers' demands and to prepare the way for a PS government in 2012 which would do the bankers' bidding, just as the social democratic governments of José Luis Zapatero in Spain and George Papandreu in Greece have done with disastrous results for the working class.

Never having called for the bringing down of the Sarkozy government by the action of workers and youth, the pseudo-left in alliance with the bourgeoisie, as in Tunisia and Egypt today, seek a peaceful transition to a government that will guarantee the continuation of capitalism.

The NPA's political orientation to the PS and the unions precludes any serious struggle to realize the list of further measures (redistribution of incomes, etc.) that are tacked on to their proposals. The redistribution of income is a revolutionary measure, and as such cannot be realized by the NPA and their ilk.



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