

# French New Anti-Capitalist Party's summer school marks new rightward lurch

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The New Anti-Capitalist Party's (NPA) August 28-31 summer school was marked by the collapse of the school's attendance and the NPA's broader membership, and embittered internal debates. Controversy erupted over how to organize relations with the big-business Socialist Party (PS), and the selection of Philippe Poutou (a Ford union official) to replace Olivier Besancenot as the NPA's 2012 presidential candidate.

*Mediapart*—a web journal run by Edwy Plenel, an ex-member of the NPA's predecessor, the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR), and former editor of *Le Monde*—titled its article on the school “Is it the final crisis?”

It wrote that since the LCR founded the NPA in 2009, “half the members have left, and those that remain are now divided in two factions, with the supporters of a more ‘revolutionary’ line—hostile to negotiations with the Left Front—having a slight advantage. They chose Philippe Poutou, a 44-year-old metalworker, as a presidential candidate. The others, supporting a more unitary line, have looked on impotently to a process they see as a betrayal. After the summer break, where are they? Is the NPA dead or not?”

The NPA debate emerging from the summer school is incoherent and unprincipled. The Libyan war—French imperialism's main military engagement, supported by the NPA—was not publicly discussed. Unclassified disputes erupted over the NPA's collaboration with the PS and the Left Front, which is dominated by the French Communist Party (PCF), the PS's junior partner in government coalitions.

Ingrid Hayes, a leader of the “unitary” tendency advocating closer ties with the Left Front, said: “I can't get over the feeling we are in a total mess. And it worries me because it threatens the survival of the tendency I joined ten years ago. The only function of Philippe Poutou's candidacy is to install a sectarian tendency at the head of the NPA.”

The leadership of the so-called “revolutionary” majority angrily rejected claims that they were not sufficiently close to the Left Front. NPA leader Alain Krivine said that the “unitary” faction “thinks we've betrayed. I don't think that at all. Three quarters of the NPA's activities are unitary.”

His deputy Olivier Sabado tactfully added that those who called the majority's policies “sectarian” were “dumb\*sses.”

These unclarified disputes arise from the crisis of the NPA's petty-bourgeois perspective, which is being shattered by the upsurge of the class struggle. When the LCR founded the NPA in 2009, it rejected any association with Trotskyism that lingered from the 1970s, when the LCR was formed by “Trotsko-Guevarist” student youth on a petty-bourgeois, Pabloite perspective. In renaming itself the NPA, the LCR was trying to establish itself as a servant of French imperialism—a mild critic of the PS, working closely with forces in the Left Front and the union bureaucracy.

This perspective was based on a tissue of lies, which are now dissolving. The “unitary” NPA faction dares not openly campaign for the policy that logically follows from its perspective—to join the Left Front in a PS-led government, should it emerge in 2012, on a platform of war and social austerity. This would expose the fiction, advanced by the NPA, that it is independent from the PS.

As for the “majority” around Krivine, Sabado, and Besancenot, they cannot defend themselves against accusations that they are “sectarian.” This is because they dare not explain the type of collaboration that exists between the NPA, the PS, and the PCF. Any serious examination of these relations exposes the NPA's role as a reactionary tool of French imperialism.

These relations include crass back-room deal-making with the PS to ensure the NPA's media profile. The extensive secret discussions of Krivine and Sabado with leading PS officials to arrange publicity and political support for Besancenot's 2002 presidential campaign are never referred to in public. (See: Why is the NPA's Olivier Besancenot sitting out the 2012 French presidential race?)

More broadly, however, the NPA's perspective of collaborating with the bourgeois “left” and the unions brought it into a head-on collision with the rising struggles of the working class.

Last October the NPA covered for the betrayal of the powerful oil, port and transport strikes that erupted against President Nicolas Sarkozy's pension cuts. The NPA supported the Stalinist General

Confederation of Labor (CGT) union, which refused to organize any solidarity action as Sarkozy ordered police to break the refinery strike. Instead, leading NPA members published articles calling for workers to limit themselves to “playful” protests against police strike-breaking.

The NPA held its February national congress amid the revolutionary struggles of the Tunisian and then the Egyptian proletariat that toppled two Western-backed dictators, Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

The NPA reacted by lining up with PS and French imperialism against the North African working class. After the fall of Ben Ali in Tunisia—a former French colony whose ruling elite has close and corrupt relations with French imperialism—it issued a cynical joint statement with the PS, calling for a “true democratic transition.” This aimed to protect French imperialist interests in Tunisia by giving a “democratic” fig leaf to an interim government of Ben Ali officials and union bureaucrats. (See: Tunisian popular revolt exposes France’s middle-class “left”).

The NPA’s congress was a political fiasco, as four tendencies advanced competing political programs, none of which gained a majority. A national meeting was subsequently scheduled for late June to try to formulate a common program.

After the national congress, however, several members of the NPA’s “unitary” wing, including Leila Chaibi and Maël Goepfert, joined the Left Front. They now occupy leading positions in the Left Front and can hope to obtain political positions in the state.

Further supporting French imperialist policy in the Middle East, the NPA then backed the French drive for war against Libya in March—in which the Western powers sought to cynically posture as friends of “democratic” revolutions against Western-backed dictators, while installing a pliant pro-Western regime in Tripoli to loot Libya’s massive oil reserves.

This policy was hidden behind breathless warnings that Libyan Colonel Muammar Gaddafi might carry out a massacre against protesters in Benghazi. In an article posted in March on the NPA web site, Gilbert Achcar wrote: “Here is a case where a population is truly in danger and where there is no plausible alternative that could protect it... You can’t in the name of anti-imperialist principles oppose an action that will prevent the massacre of civilians.”

This was a miserable political lie. The NPA supported the Western-backed “rebel” National Transitional Council (NTC), demanding that the French government arm it against Gaddafi—a suggestion that Paris ultimately took, in violation of a UN arms embargo on Libya. This amounted simply to giving a pseudo-“revolutionary” cover for NATO bombing and Special Forces operations leading NTC forces in the field.

The killing of thousands of people in NATO air strikes and racist reprisals against black African workers in Libya is a devastating refutation of the NPA’s contention that Libyan workers could wage a revolutionary struggle by appealing to imperialism.

The June national meeting, which led to the selection of Poutou as the NPA candidate, was marked by the explosion of support for the “unitary” Position B—which grew from roughly one quarter of the NPA vote, at the time of the NPA congress, to over 40 percent.

Position B denounced Position A for “cultivating isolation as a virtue.” It demanded that the NPA formulate its policies “without excluding political forces and currents. We want to beat the right and the [neo-fascist National Front] in 2012.” It obtained the support of several Besancenot associates, like Pierre-François Grond and Frédéric Borras, who were described in the press as “former” allies of Besancenot and the NPA majority.

The majority’s Position A criticized the “unitary” Position B for wanting to “create a bloc uniting everyone to the left of the PS, looking at the PCF, which is up to its neck in the institutions of capitalism.” Position A did not mention, however, that it is also “up to its neck” in the very same blood and filth as Position B.

A tiny Position C, the Collective for a Revolutionary Tendency, emerged and claimed that it wanted to return the NPA to a “revolutionary” line. This was itself a political trick, trying to give the NPA totally undeserved “revolutionary” credibility; Position C made clear it had no significant political differences with the NPA majority. Speaking to *Rue 89*, Position C supporters praised Besancenot, explaining: “The NPA has a hearing. Besancenot manages to produce an image as a radical leader. That helps us.”

This only highlights that the NPA’s so-called “revolutionary” faction supports Besancenot and the NPA majority as they try to politically tie the workers to the bourgeois “left,” social austerity, and war.

These competing tendencies now threaten to split the NPA in the aftermath of the summer school. Position B, speaking for the rising sentiment inside the NPA for a direct electoral alliance with the parties of French imperialism, is considering formally adopting a name and starting a separate web site from the NPA majority.



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