

Lutte Ouvrière mounts nationalist French presidential election campaign

Anthony Torres
26 March 2012

On March 7, Lutte Ouvrière (LO—Workers Struggle) delivered to the Constitutional Council the 521 signatures of mayors required for Nathalie Arthaud, successor to Arlette Laguiller as LO's presidential candidate, to run in the elections. She was the first person to be placed officially on the list of candidates running for the election.

Nathalie Arthaud has a nationalist programme that covers up for the crimes of imperialism and is based on the illusion that the trade unions can be transformed into instruments of political struggle of the proletariat. In order to masquerade as “left,” she employs a pseudo-Marxist vocabulary, evoking the class struggle as an abstraction largely devoid of any meaning.

After the delivery of the signatures, Arthaud told *Le Nouvel Observateur*: “It’s a question of countering policies which are always in favour of the rich and powerful and big business with policies for the workers.”

In the statement announcing its campaign, LO puts forward a series of demands, most of them historically associated with the workers movement—the sliding scale of wages, outlawing sackings and wage cuts, and workers’ and people’s control of businesses. LO explains that this programme can be realized only through struggle. However, Arthaud does not say on what perspective such a struggle is to be carried out.

By this omission, LO seeks to promote the illusion that the workers can win such advances under capitalism, with the help of the trade unions pressuring a future government—possibly led by François Hollande, the Socialist Party (PS) candidate.

LO knows full well that the PS has a right-wing programme. It points out that between Hollande and incumbent President Nicolas Sarkozy “the political differences are minimal on the fundamental question of

policies for the crisis.” Nonetheless, LO’s perspective is to give more or less explicit support to the PS, despite its anti-working class policies—such as in 2007, when Arlette Laguiller called for a vote for PS candidate Ségolène Royal in the run-off against Sarkozy.

In the 2008 municipal elections, LO proposed local alliances with other bourgeois “left” parties. LO leader Georges Kaldy explained: “We are not offering our services to the PS, but where the left could be ousted by the right or could win a town council, we discuss. We don’t want our votes to favour the right.” To explain why they defended the PS in 2007, when they had not dared to do so openly in 2002, Kaldy added: “In 2001, we did not want to support the left in power. Sarkozy’s election and his general offensive against the workers has changed the situation.”

Nathalie Arthaud is a municipal councillor in charge of youth at Vaulx-en-Velin, where she was elected on a list headed by the Communist Party (PCF). Also on the list were the groups Citizens’ Initiative and The Alternatives (anarchists).

Artaud and LO pass over in total silence the collaboration between the trade unions, particularly the CGT (General Confederation of Labour), which is close to the PCF, in imposing austerity measures against the working class. Particularly flagrant is their attitude towards the refineries strike in the autumn of 2010 against President Nicolas Sarkozy’s pension reform. The strike was crushed by police, as the unions stood aside and refused to mobilise broader working class opposition to Sarkozy, and the pension cut was pushed through.

In its article, “Balance sheet of the September 7 movement”, which appeared in November 2010, LO admits that the unions were hostile to the perspective of

a general strike, not to mention a revolutionary struggle against the reform. But they attack any criticism of the role of the unions in negotiating the pension cut with Sarkozy.

The article says: “It is childish to condemn the lack of calls for this by the union confederations. In the event, the CGT and the CFDT (French Democratic Confederation of Labour)—as SUD (Solidarity, Unity, Democracy), and in another way FO (Workers Power)—were all the more given to radical language as they had neither the strength nor the authority needed to do what they claimed it was useful to do. Clearly they had no desire to carry out a policy for preparing the general strike. But they did not hold back the struggle, because there was nothing to hold back.”

Thus, for LO there was no movement and no objective opposition from the proletariat to the cuts; it was simply that the unions were not quite radical enough. The fault, according to LO, rested with the proletariat, which did not follow the lead of the union bureaucracy. This presentation is deeply demoralised and false: workers were profoundly hostile to the reform, and demonstrations against it attracted millions of people.

LO adds: “Nevertheless the movement was, within limits, a success for the workers themselves by the mere fact that they raised their heads and showed that they will have to be reckoned with.”

Thus, LO apparently thinks that the seizure of the refineries and the petrol depots by the CRS riot police, the requisitioning of workers to get the refineries back into production, and the control of the social movement by anti-revolutionary unions together constitute a “success.”

This is because LO supports all initiatives led by the unions aiming to politically straitjacket the working class. LO opposed any struggle to save the Continental factory at Clairoix. LO, just like the Clairoix factory union steward and LO supporter Xavier Mathieu, presented the provision of severance packages—in exchange for the shutting of the factory with union support—as a victory.

The defence of jobs and social gains involves an independent political struggle by the workers for the taking of power by the working class, in opposition to the unions and the PS and its satellites. LO is hostile to such a perspective.

On the issue of French imperialist foreign policy, there is not a word—preferring to leave the New Anti-Capitalist Party and other organisations with the task of giving official support for the military interventions and preparations for war by France and NATO in North Africa and the Middle East.

This indifference on the part of LO to the wars and their effect on the international working class defines LO as being not a workers’ organisation, but rather an organisation of a layer in the middle class, and especially of the union bureaucracies. LO says nothing about the hundreds of thousands of workers and oppressed people who have died or will die in such wars. As for the working class in France, it will be faced with austerity like that being imposed on Greece if France tries to pay for a new wave of wars.

France’s austerity programmes and military interventions will come up against the hostility of workers, which is why the French bourgeoisie seeks to attack the democratic rights of the working class: the law banning the burka, the expulsion of the Roma, the repression of refinery strikers during the movement against the pension reform. LO says nothing about that either, revealing the scant importance that the party attaches to the democratic rights of the working class.

Like other so-called “far left” parties, LO strives for the working class to support the national and international policies of the French bourgeoisie. LO and Nathalie Artaud have nothing in common with the socialist and internationalist traditions they claim to represent.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact