

New Anti-Capitalist Party backs Left Front, social cuts in French presidential election

Alex Lantier in Paris
12 April 2012

In a coordinated media campaign, leading members of France's New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA) called yesterday for an alliance with the Stalinist-dominated Left Front and signaled that they will support Socialist Party (PS) candidate François Hollande, despite his free-market agenda.

NPA presidential candidate Philippe Poutou gave a long interview in *Le Monde* calling for the Left Front and the petty-bourgeois "left" Workers Struggle (LO) group to join together to build an "opposition to the PS." He explained, "If the left [i.e., the PS] wins, we will have to build an opposition to the government ... And this opposition, the NPA cannot build it alone."

Asked if he would call to vote for Hollande in the second round to defeat incumbent conservative President Nicolas Sarkozy, Poutou signaled that he would: "We will discuss it collectively after the first round to know how to formulate the NPA's position. Today, what we say is that we must remove Sarkozy and his entire gang."

NPA spokesman and two-time presidential candidate Olivier Besancenot appeared on Europe1 radio to deliver a similar message: "We must build an opposition on the left of the government, a demand we are addressing to [Left Front candidate] Jean-Luc Mélenchon and [LO candidate] Nathalie Arthaud. Will they be ready to join us, yes or no?"

Asked if he opposed the PS to the extent of not wanting to see either Sarkozy or Hollande at the Elysée presidential palace, he replied: "No, no. ... If we manage to beat Sarkozy, François Hollande will be at the Elysée." Noting that large sections of the Left Front would try to get positions in government if Hollande won the presidency, he said he wanted an alliance with "the most independent people," adding: "I see things in terms of resistance."

Behind the NPA's empty promises of "opposition" and "resistance," the political reality is that the party supports a Hollande victory and is preparing an alliance with forces that will join PS officials in ministerial cabinets or in parliamentary blocs. These forces include the Left Party (PG) of Mélenchon, the former PS minister running as the Left Front candidate, and the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF), the PS's traditional coalition partner that provides most of the Left Front's membership.

The NPA is backing them not despite, but because of the policies they will carry out, policies which the NPA is aware of and is willing to support. Thus, after a March 27 NPA campaign meeting in Clermont-Ferrand, Poutou said he would "call for Sarkozy's defeat," even though the NPA has "no confidence" in Hollande, whose policies "would be left-wing austerity. ... But that does not mean that Sarkozy and Hollande are Tweedledee and Tweedledum."

That is to say, the NPA is willing to support austerity, if it is carried out by the bourgeois "left" party, not Sarkozy. This is entirely in line with the broader policies pursued by the NPA, which has supported the trade union bureaucracy as it strangled strikes and protests by the working class against austerity policies, and French imperialism in its wars in Libya and Syria. These policies brand the NPA as a pro-imperialist, petty-bourgeois party moving rapidly to the right.

The argument that Poutou advances for supporting Hollande—that, as a bourgeois "left" politician he will carry out milder, more acceptable cuts—is a political lie.

Viewed from a factual standpoint, this assertion is false. In Greece, the bourgeoisie turned to social democratic politicians, first Giorgios Papandreu in 2009 and then Lucas Papademos last year, to destroy the postwar gains of the working class by carrying out

the most drastic cuts in Europe. The two social-democratic prime ministers have slashed wages 30 to 50 percent, sent unemployment soaring, and deprived masses of people of shelter and access to medical care.

More significantly, however, it indicates the class gulf that separates the views of the NPA from a revolutionary opposition to the capitalist ruling elite. Despite its name, the NPA is not opposed to capitalism; rather, it is seeking to renegotiate its position inside the petty-bourgeois “left” forces in the orbit of the PS.

In his *Le Monde* interview, Poutou gave a nod to the Stalinist PCF and the PG (Left Party), Mélenchon’s split-off from the PS, praising Mélenchon’s campaign: “It is a positive success, because it can cheer up supporters of the PCF [the Stalinist French Communist Party] and the PG, though if it is to do the trick of the Plural Left, it’s a problem.”

In fact, Mélenchon was an early supporter of the 1997-2002 Plural Left government, led by the PS and PCF, whose program of privatizations and job cuts made it deeply unpopular. Poutou nonetheless promotes illusions that the Left Front could carry out a different policy from the Plural Left government in order to justify the NPA’s support for them.

This entirely vindicates the WSWs’ analysis in 2009, as the “Trotsky-Guevarist” Revolutionary Communist League (LCR) dissolved itself to found the NPA. The WSWs wrote, “To be part of the bourgeoisie’s realignment of the left, the LCR must make clear they are breaking whatever tenuous association they had with revolutionary politics. To the extent that the LCR is publicly identified with Trotskyism, this is an obstacle to the sharp swing to the right that the LCR anticipates it will carry out in collaboration with the trade unions, the Socialist Party, and other forces of the French political establishment.”

As the bourgeoisie moves to transform class relations across Europe—with devastating austerity measures in Greece, Portugal, Spain, Italy and beyond—the NPA wants to help impose these policies on the working class. Whether it does so inside the Left Front as part of a pro-PS parliamentary majority, or simply as a loyal opposition to the PS offering constructive criticism to Hollande, is from the standpoint of the ruling class a technicality. It will press for whatever option more effectively limits working class opposition to the cuts.

In France, economists argue, wages should be cut 10

to 20 percent across the board to compete with German industry. This is, however, only a down payment on the cuts that will be demanded to keep the exploitation of French and German workers in line with that of their super-exploited class brothers in southern Europe and the industrializing countries of Asia and Latin America.

This is the task Hollande and his petty-bourgeois “left” supporters like the NPA will receive from the bourgeoisie should the PS win the presidential elections.



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