

France's New Anti-capitalist Party backs Socialist Party candidate in May 6 run-off

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After Sunday's first round of the French presidential election, the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) is backing the pro-austerity Socialist Party (PS) candidate François Hollande against incumbent President Nicolas Sarkozy in the May 6 run-off.

NPA presidential candidate Philippe Poutou, who got 1.2 percent in the first round of the vote, has called for a Hollande vote in the run-off, declaring: "On May 6, we will accompany those who want to prevent Nicolas Sarkozy from having a second term. We say clearly, we must throw out Sarkozy and his whole gang by voting against him."

The NPA's attempt to dress up a vote for Hollande behind opposition to Sarkozy is an act of political bad faith. It is well aware that the PS's basic program is to make hundreds of billions of euros in cuts to social programs, continue France's participation in NATO, and escalate its war drive in the Middle East—with wars last year in Libya and now in Syria. It aims to disorient the working class by campaigning for a reactionary PS government.

Poutou cynically claimed that his support for a Hollande vote "does not mean any support for the policies of François Hollande ... Against the hard right, the PS and its candidate have no answers. The PS's project is inscribed in the main lines of the orientation of the European Union and the European social-democrats. He is already announcing austerity policies, for a 'left austerity.'"

This begs the question: why then should workers support Hollande by giving him their vote? The NPA's implicit claim that Hollande represents a political alternative to Sarkozy is—as their own comments make clear—a political fraud.

The NPA's Anti-capitalist Left (GA) faction is also

calling for a Hollande vote, even more explicitly: "The main task is to expel the incumbent. ... Beating the right is a fundamental priority. Without hesitation the Anti-capitalist Left asks voters to use a Hollande ballot in the second round to definitively chase the right from power."

The GA, which emerged after the NPA's summer school last year, opposed Poutou's candidacy and sought an alliance with the Left Front—a coalition of the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF), the Left Party (PG), and a faction of the NPA led by Christian Picquet. It backed the Left Front's presidential candidate Jean Luc Mélenchon, a former PS minister who left the PS in 2008 to found the PG.

On March 18, the GA unanimously adopted a statement at its national meeting endorsing an alliance with the Left Front. It declared, "The campaign of Jean-Luc Mélenchon outlines a broad spectrum of political propositions common to the entire radical left: requisitioning enterprises that lay off workers while offshoring jobs, taking measures to muzzle finance, refusing to make the majority of the population pay for the crisis."

Having lined up behind the Left Front, the NPA majority and the GA squabbled over how to share the €2 million paid by the state for the NPA's 2007 presidential election campaign between the NPA majority, the GA, and Picquet. Besides the money question, however, the differences between the two tendencies were limited to political tactics. Both ultimately seek to function as "left" satellites of the PS, to tie the working class to this party of the French ruling class.

For his part, Mélenchon has endorsed Hollande, who relies on the Left Front to provide a "left" face for his

right-wing policies. Mélenchon has called a May 4 election meeting in Paris to support Hollande. The GA is still promoting illusions about Mélenchon, writing: “On the Left, Mélenchon’s score confirms the political, social, trade union, and non-governmental organizational drive that boosted the Left Front in recent months.”

Both the NPA and the GA are citing the rising vote for the neo-fascist National Front (FN) of Marine Le Pen, who took third place with 18 percent of the vote, to promote a PS vote. They attacked Sarkozy as an “advocate of a hard, law-and-order, racist, xenophobic, anti-social hard right, the man who wants to pick up FN voters, boosted Marine Le Pen’s vote ... The far-right’s score is very alarming, it constitutes the poisonous political reflection of a deepening economic crisis.”

Relying on the PS to defend the workers from the FN is a reactionary dead end for the working class. Indeed, the FN’s rise is the result of the treachery of the petty bourgeois “left” parties, such as the NPA, who betrayed working class struggles against the social cuts and their alignment with the anti-democratic measures promoted by Sarkozy in recent years.

In the 2002 presidential election, the LCR (the predecessor of the NPA) and other petty bourgeois forces joined with the PS in calling for a vote for right-wing incumbent Jacques Chirac against FN leader Jean Marie Le Pen in the run-off, after Le Pen defeated PS candidate Lionel Jospin in the first round.

At the time, the International Committee of the Fourth International issued an appeal for an active boycott of the election, to prepare an independent mobilization of the working class in a struggle against French capitalism. However, the LCR rejected the call, campaigning in defence of the French bourgeois republic and for a Chirac vote.

Since 2002, while it imposed social cuts negotiated with the union bureaucracy, the political establishment adopted anti-democratic measures such as the headscarf ban in the schools under Chirac, and the ban on wearing burqa in public by Sarkozy, along with draconian attacks on immigrants. All these were done with the support of the petty bourgeois “left” parties. While tying working class opposition to social cuts to toothless protests controlled by the union bureaucracy, they backed France’s imperialist wars abroad, such as in Libya.

Their role in suppressing any effective opposition from the left to the policies of the French bourgeoisie has set the stage for the emergence of the FN and its far-right chauvinism. The FN is exploiting the political vacuum on the left to posture as a party dedicated to resolving pressing social problems and opposing French military intervention, while appealing to reactionary anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiment.

While backing Hollande, the GA and the NPA are now cynically declaring that they want to build an anti-crisis left bloc, incorporating the Left Front and various petty bourgeois “left” parties, to oppose the austerity policies of the coming government.

Poutou called for an alliance with the Left Front and the unions to “prepare immediately the counter-offensive the world of labor needs.” For its part, the GA declared itself “available” to “build the anti-crisis bloc which is necessary now more than ever.”

Such an alliance—assembling forces politically tied to the PS and the French ruling class, and completely cut off from broad masses of workers—is capable only of preparing further defeats for the working class and victories for the FN.



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