

Inside the New Anti-capitalist Party's Paris election meeting

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On Thursday, *World Socialist Web Site* reporters attended the New Anti-capitalist Party's regional election meeting in Paris, featuring NPA presidential candidate Philippe Poutou and former NPA spokesman and presidential candidate Olivier Besancenot.

The meeting was a living picture of the NPA and its middle-class milieu—the trade union bureaucracy, university circles, publishing houses. A few hundred NPA members and a smaller number of visitors fit into one end of the *Halle Carpentier* gymnasium in Paris. The meeting, which began 30 minutes late, had the feeling of a social gathering. Student youth crowded around a table covered with T-shirts for sale, while a well-dressed older set clustered in groups of 3 or 4 to chat.

An unserious tone prevailed throughout. During opening comments by NPA student leader Mina Khalil and postal union official Gaël Quirante, Poutou and Besancenot exchanged jokes and hand signals.

NPA spokeswoman Christine Poupin spoke to demand “public, ecological and democratic planning.” She began by claiming that voters should choose Poutou because his election platform advocated the “expropriation of the banks and a public energy service.” Calling for an end to France's reliance on nuclear energy, she denounced the contrast between “the response to save the banks compared to inactivity on ecological questions.”

Her remarks set the tone for the meeting. There would be no talk of socialism—the word was not pronounced even once—or of the contrast between the bourgeoisie's multi-trillion-dollar bank bailouts and multi-trillion-dollar social cuts against the working class. There was just a mild “eco-socialism,” acceptable to any Electricité de France middle manager concerned about recycling.

Besancenot gave a brief address, focusing on the supposedly inevitable treachery of professional politicians. He said, “Who our spokesman is, that changes. It can upset us, but we're proud. We have had enough of professional politicians; one feels that they will soon betray us.”

Such denunciations of all politicians, irrespective of their political affiliation and perspective, are deeply reactionary. They are the stock-in-trade of petty-bourgeois anarchists hostile to the international Marxist movement's struggle to develop mass revolutionary parties in the working class. They are particularly dishonest and absurd coming from Besancenot. Whatever his pretenses of being a part-time postman and trade unionist, he is himself a professional politician, with lucrative book contracts and ties throughout the French political elite.

Like most of the speeches at the NPA meeting, the significance of Besancenot's remarks has to be deduced from the numerous unstated assumptions that the speakers do not want to make explicit. The speech was a defense of Besancenot's decision not to stand in 2012 and the NPA's decision to instead run Poutou, a less well-known candidate. Poutou has received substantially less television coverage, as the media has trained its attention on the Stalinist-dominated Left Front and its candidate, former PS minister Jean-Luc Mélenchon.

Poutou, a CGT (General Confederation of Labour) union official at a Ford plant near Bordeaux, invariably presents himself as an unprepared and uninformed worker, out of place in the milieu of presidential campaigns and professional politics. He began his speech by proclaiming that, as a “lower-class worker,” he was “a little bit intimidated” at the idea of speaking at the meeting.

No less than Besancenot's posturing as a part-time postman, Poutou's posturing as a humble auto worker is a fraud. Capable of delivering without notes a 30 minute summary of various statistics and NPA talking points, Poutou is clearly an experienced political operator. He is simply assuming the identity, concocted together with the NPA, of a clueless worker. This pose reflects the NPA leadership's paternalistic contempt for the working class, not anything real about Philippe Poutou the union official.

The deliberately demoralized appearance of Poutou's candidacy has helped the media shift its attention to Mélenchon, who is the mechanism for the petty-bourgeois "left" to swing behind Socialist Party (PS) candidate François Hollande and his program of social cuts. (See "French Socialist Party candidate Hollande praises Left Front").

Against the social cuts he acknowledged the next president will try to impose, Poutou called for the NPA to prepare "a united counterattack by the 'left of the left'—the Left Front, Workers Struggle, the left of the trade unions and non-governmental organizations." Poutou also indicated that the NPA will support Hollande against the incumbent Gaullist president, Nicolas Sarkozy, in the May 6 second round of the election, stating that the most important thing is to "overthrow Sarkozy and his gang."

On Friday, Besancenot said he wanted to meet Hollande—though the NPA acknowledges that Hollande is preparing to impose austerity measures—on May 7, the day after the election.

Poutou made a deceitful show of opposition to France's imperialist wars in the Middle East and Africa. He claimed to support "anti-imperialism," denouncing the French Republic for "two centuries of pillage of the peoples, pillage of poor countries."

Poutou could claim that the NPA has such positions only because he avoided, characteristically for the NPA, any examination of the party's record. It is a record of support for imperialist war abroad and hostility to any working class struggle at home that threatens to escape the grip of the trade union bureaucracy.

The NPA's attitude towards workers' struggles was perhaps clearest during France's last major strike movement, the 2010 oil strike against President Sarkozy's pension cuts. As the Communist Party-

influenced CGT tacitly backed police strike-breaking by refusing to organize solidarity strikes, the NPA cynically echoed CGT calls for limited, "playful" protests.

As for being an anti-imperialist party, the NPA backed the war by French and US imperialism in Libya and supports their current intervention in Syria, based on the lie that Western-funded armed "rebel" groups are revolutionaries carrying out independent struggles for democracy.

After the meeting, WSWs reporters spoke briefly about this to Alain Krivine, the long-time leader of the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR), which founded the NPA in 2009.

Asked about the NPA's support for the arming of Western-backed "rebel" forces in Syria and Libya, Krivine said: "We are against any armed intervention by the state. Intervention is aggression. On the other hand, I want the population to buy weapons."

Krivine's claim that he opposes state intervention in Syria, while supporting imperialist states' arming of their "rebel" proxies inside Syria, is a meaningless distinction aimed only at hiding his support for the war.

The WSWs reporter noted that the provision of arms to Syrian "rebel" forces, which Krivine supported, was, in fact, state intervention in Syria, unless the weapons were being supplied by unknown organizations unconnected to foreign states. Krivine responded, "Of course such organizations don't exist; what exists is arms trafficking."

The authors also recommend:

A tool of imperialism: France's New Anti-Capitalist Party backs war on Libya
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