

How the Lutte Ouvrière group backed Hollande in the French elections

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The second round of the French elections earlier this month witnessed the entire coterie of middle-class groups that operate in the orbit of the Socialist Party (PS) fall quickly in line behind its candidate, Francois Hollande. The process was not unexpected, but still instructive as to the nature and role of these organizations.

After the first round of the presidential election on April 22, Nathalie Arthaud, the presidential candidate for Lutte Ouvrière (Workers Struggle, LO), suggested, in a tortuous statement, that she did not object to a vote for Hollande, who eventually won in the May 6 run-off with incumbent Nicolas Sarkozy.

LO got 0.56 percent of the vote, less than half of its 2007 total and one tenth of what it did in 2002. Arthaud explained that she would urge those who had voted for her in the first round to vote “according to their conscience” in the second. She then made clear that she considered a vote for Hollande as an appropriate choice. She wrote: “Obviously, no conscious worker can vote for Nicolas Sarkozy, the president of the rich, the man who, during his five-year mandate, was the faithful servant of big business and the bankers. Some of my voters, confronted with the loaded choice between the open enemy of workers and a false friend, will abstain or cast a blank vote. Others, to get rid of Sarkozy, will vote for François Hollande.”

Arthaud thus fell in line with the press campaign of Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s Left Front and the New Anti-capitalist Party, which, basing themselves on the same arguments as Arthaud, called for a Hollande vote.

This sums up what Arthaud’s campaign finally turned into: falling in line behind François Hollande, a reactionary candidate who campaigned on the basis of imposing budget discipline, renegotiating the European fiscal pact and continuing imperialist wars in Libya and

Syria. LO’s position is particularly cynical: it indicates that it can support a vote for Hollande, while admitting that a Hollande victory will bring austerity and the likelihood of new advances for the neo-fascist National Front (FN). Arthaud recognized this in her statement in the evening of April 22: “The greater the discontent created by the austerity measures which Hollande will take under the pressure of the financial circles, the more the far right will be strengthened.”

This raises an important question: if the LO knows that a Hollande government will attack workers’ social rights and strengthen the neo-fascists, why did LO not warn workers of the danger represented by such a government and the need for a political programme independent of the bourgeois “left” PS? Why did it not denounce Hollande, oppose a Hollande vote, and warn of the social attacks on the working class that his victory would produce?

Embedded as it is in the trade union bureaucracy and disoriented student circles, LO is trying to block any perspective for a struggle against Hollande from emerging. These layers have, in fact, co-organised the attacks on the social gains of the working class by Hollande’s predecessor, President Nicolas Sarkozy.

Under the pretext of a struggle against the far right, after the elections the LO intends to make an alliance with the forces supporting the PS. Commenting on the growth of the neo-fascist vote, Arthaud said: “Only the strengthening of the forces on the terrain of the political interests of the working class can constitute a counterweight to the strengthening of the far right and prevent it from claiming to have the monopoly of the opposition.”

Neither Arthaud nor LO support an independent struggle by the working class. They want to see workers’ struggles contained and defused by the union

bureaucracy and the corrupt “left” parties of France’s political establishment.

LO continues to describe the PS as a left party—a formula designed to create the illusion that by demonstrations or possibly strikes led by the unions, the PS will respond to popular pressure. This is indeed the only type of “struggle” LO would countenance under a PS government. Behind the praise of the working class as “a great and irresistible force” in LO’s March 26 editorial, there lies a practice of demobilizing and demoralizing popular opposition.

Even the reason given by Arthaud for her campaign reflected the conservatism of a party for which anything could happen, except a revolution. All that could be done, according to her, was “to carry the torch” of communism, so that the working class could in some distant, hypothetical future “move again into a situation of struggle.”

In an April 13 interview in *Le Monde*, Arthaud laid out her notion of “carrying the torch.” She said, “At LO, we are those who pass it on, that’s how we live. Of course, I would want the great day of the revolution tomorrow, but meanwhile, I fight. Marx saw the crushing of the Paris Commune but not the workers’ revolution, and, as for me, perhaps I’ll get to see nothing at all.”

Given that Arthaud is 42 and statistically can expect to live 40 more years, such a statement is remarkable. In her view, the misery created by the economic crisis, austerity and the catastrophes caused by France and America’s wars and those of other imperialist powers will go on until 2050. There is little that could more completely expose the demoralized and bankrupt outlook of the LO.



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