

New Anti-capitalist Party presses for Socialist Party government in France

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The night of the first round of the French legislative elections on Sunday, France's New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) was already applauding projections that the Socialist Party (PS) of President François Hollande stands to win a parliamentary majority in the June 17 second round.

The NPA issued a statement claiming that “The conditions are there, next Sunday, to make a decisive break with the right without forgetting to trounce the far right.”

This echoed a June 6 statement issued by NPA leaders Philippe Poutou, the NPA's 2012 presidential candidate, Olivier Besancenot and Christine Poupin, which claimed: “Of course, these elections are the occasion to make a definitive break with the right.”

These statements are part of the broader campaign by the NPA and the French petty-bourgeois parties to promote the big-business PS. For the presidential runoff on May 6, between Hollande and the conservative incumbent Nicolas Sarkozy, the NPA called for an unconditional vote for Hollande.

At the same time, when it feels it cannot retain its political credibility if it completely aligns itself with the incoming government, the NPA tries to strike a pose of limited opposition to Hollande and the PS. In the June 10 statement, referring to the high votes for the neo-fascist National Front, the NPA says: “They are the consequence of 30 years of socially regressive policies by the right and the left.”

Again, the June 6 statement tries to cover up its support for the bourgeois “left” PS: “But to make a

break unfortunately does not mean that you break out of the great doctrine of the free market and of austerity ... The PS's policies prove that the cohabitation between its government and the financial markets has already begun. The government has no intention of raising wages, no more than it intends to legislate against sackings. The government will not even repeal what the right has done.”

It adds: “Moreover, by engaging in the process of ratifying the European Budget Stability Pact, Hollande is tying his programme to the future austerity plans imposed by the new European treaty.”

The obvious question that arises is: why do they continue to support a PS government?

It is well understood in political and financial circles, as well as in broad layers of the working class, that Hollande does not represent any real break with the policies of Sarkozy. He campaigned on a platform of budgetary austerity, combined with handouts to key financial and industrial interests under the heading of a “growth component.” Hollande and the PS have no real differences with the anti-working class policies of social-democratic governments like those of George Papandreou in Greece or José Zapatero in Spain that imposed deep cuts on the workers.

The NPA's contention that electing a PS-dominated government makes possible a “definitive break with the right”—under conditions where it also admits the PS will “not even repeal what the right has done”—is politically absurd.

To the extent that it tries to give a “left” gloss to its policies, the NPA suggests that an Hollande

government will be more responsive to popular protests and likely to grant their demands. Both NPA statements use the same formulation: “Under Hollande, nothing will be given to us, and whatever we get will be what we have been able to win in struggle.”

A statement by the minority faction within the NPA, which represents some 40 percent of the membership and which wants to ally with Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Left Front (FG)—a coalition of the PS split-off Left Party (PG) and the Stalinist Communist Party (PCF)—makes the politics behind this formulation abundantly clear.

The NPA seeks to maintain an apparent independence from the PS and its Left Front allies, to keep the workers under the organizational control of the unions and channel their opposition back behind the PS.

They claim that the “social dialogue” between Hollande’s interim prime minister Jean-Marc Ayrault and the trade union and employers’ leaders is a step forward: “The big social conference due before July 14 [now rescheduled for July 17] on jobs, pensions, wages and the minimum wage will only have an effect if it can give voice to the social and democratic demands of the entire world of labour. Nothing is less sure. But one thing is certain. Since May 6 the atmosphere is ‘lighter’ and Sarkozy’s defeat paves the way to the building of a more favourable relationship of forces for our camp.”

In fact, the division of labour between the social democratic government, the union bureaucracy and petty-bourgeois forces like the NPA will prove bitterly hostile to the working class.

Hollande has committed himself to ensuring, once he has a firm majority, that France meets his campaign promise: cutting the budget deficit to 3 percent of GDP by 2013 and to zero by 2017. Amid a deepening recession in France and Europe, these targets cannot be met without drastic cuts in public spending and, correspondingly, in workers’ living standards.

The unions, including the Stalinist-led CGT (General Confederation of Labour), are also fully in agreement

with deep attacks on the workers. They were instrumental in sabotaging struggles against Sarkozy’s budget cuts—standing by without lifting a finger as police broke refinery strikes against Sarkozy’s pension cuts in the autumn of 2010. In this, they had the unflinching support of the NPA and the Stalinists.

The French and European bourgeoisie expect Hollande to control and repress the mass resistance such measures will inevitably provoke. He is relying on the unions to block independent action by the working class, even as waves of factory closures and sackings sweep the country—45 factories have been identified by the unions for potential closure, involving the loss of 46,000 jobs. This is the significance of the “Social Conference” that the NPA praises.

The NPA’s role is to hide the significance of these reactionary policies under a veneer of left-sounding rhetoric. Having helped Sarkozy inflict a series of defeats on the working class and carry out major attacks on workers’ social rights, it is ready to serve the bourgeoisie again under Hollande.



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