

France's New Anti-capitalist Party conceals plans for historic attack on European auto workers

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The New Anti-Capitalist Party's (NPA) response to plans for historic attacks on European auto workers shows that it stands on the other side of the barricades from the working class. As European automakers and trade unions prepare job cuts, wage cuts, and plant closures, the NPA offers them political cover and advances justifications for their anti-worker policies.

The NPA wrote a brief article after the French government's announcement Thursday of a €7 billion (US\$9 billion) bailout of PSA Peugeot-Citroën. PSA has been hit hard as the European car market falls from 17 million to 13 million units of yearly sales; several of its main markets, such as Italy and Spain, are reeling under austerity measures dictated by the European Union (EU). It is in negotiations with the Socialist Party (PS) government and the union bureaucracy over a plan to cut 8,000 jobs and close the Aulnay-sous-Bois plant.

After describing PSA's financing arm, the direct recipient of the French bailout, the NPA concludes: "Public funds must not serve to bail out PSA's private bank just as the corporation prepares to close factories and fire thousands of workers... Against job cuts, plant shutdowns, and now the possibly insolvency of their bank, the question of the expropriation of the Peugeot family fortune is posed."

While the expropriation of PSA's private owners is entirely justified, the NPA's claims to be advancing it are empty and false. As when the Obama administration plowed tens of billions into the Detroit bailouts of GM and Chrysler in 2009, or when German public funds financed short-time work at Opel, the state and the unions aim to make PSA profitable on lower sales volumes by attacking the workers. The working

class in France, as in the rest of Europe and in North America, can only defend jobs in a political struggle for socialist policies against governments and the unions.

This also means the working class will find itself in struggle against petty-bourgeois "left" groups like the NPA, which supports both the unions and the PS—whom the NPA endorsed unconditionally in this year's presidential elections.

The French unions are consciously imitating the Detroit auto bailout, as PSA organizes its corporate tie-up with GM. The US bailout led to the closure of dozens of plants, 35,000 job cuts, the slashing of hourly wages for new hires from \$23 to \$10-14, and benefit cuts. In exchange, the United Auto Workers (UAW) union signed a six-year no-strike pledge and received billions of dollars in auto firms' stocks for a retiree health fund, giving them a direct financial incentive to boost auto profits at their members' expense.

According to a report in *Le Bien Public*, Germany's IG Metall and France's General Confederation of Labor (CGT) traveled last month to Detroit to meet with UAW and GM executives. Reporting on what it called a "secret conclave" of the unions, *Le Bien Public* quoted CGT official Bruno Lemerle: "The PSA-GM alliance means that we will do together what we used to do separately. There will be savings. At the CGT, we hope the alliance with GM will produce more projects for our plants in France."

That is to say, while the CGT learns from the US bailout, it will compete ruthlessly with IG Metall and the UAW in attacks on their members—trying to make French plants more profitable than German or US ones, hoping that their operations will survive the cuts at GM-PSA.

The NPA's role is to paint the sordid maneuvers of the unions in "left" colors. In its July 2012 piece, "Dare to take on the Peugeot family's property," it praises the "unions, defending without compromise all jobs that are threatened" and calls for "an anti-capitalist struggle."

Though it hides behind calls for "ecological" policies and undefined "new forms of socialized appropriation," the NPA's positions make clear that it is a pro-capitalist party. Its arguments justify abject surrender to attacks on living standards in line with the unions' policies.

The NPA argues for production cuts, bluntly writing: "It is pointless to forecast an increase in the production of cars, and even more pointless to demand it." Calling the auto market "saturated," it adds: "One only has to recall finding oneself every evening and morning in clogged traffic to realize that the 'all for cars' or 'all for trucks' mentality leads to overproduction."

These arguments are reactionary and dishonest. The market is not "saturated" because Europe's population needs fewer cars—let alone 4 million fewer cars—now than before the economic crisis began. It is "saturated" because four years of economic crisis, social austerity measures, trillion-euro bank bailouts, and rising social inequality have so impoverished broad layers of workers and middle class people that they can no longer afford cars.

That is, the NPA advocates production cuts not based on social need, but on the auto firms' profit calculations. The NPA's claims to be an "anti-capitalist" party are a pack of lies.

A truly anti-capitalist—that is, socialist—position would include demands for the creation of tens of millions of jobs in auto and other industries throughout Europe and North America. If their markets are currently "saturated" because workers cannot afford their products, the working class should expropriate the trillions spent by the EU and the United States on bank bailouts that are destroying the economy. This would help lay the basis for an international planned economy, democratically controlled by the working class.

The NPA dismisses such demands as "pointless" because workers can fight for them only in revolutionary opposition to imperialist governments and reactionary union bureaucracies, both of which the NPA supports.

It even explicitly dismisses the impact on PSA of the NATO embargo on Iran, trying to limit popular opposition to Middle East wars. It writes, "The blocking of Peugeot sales to Iran due to the Western embargo is not a structural cause of Peugeot's difficulties; it is evident that these sales were only temporary, given the irreversible tendency of countries like Iran to develop their own, ever more integrated auto industry."

This is absurd. Over the last two years, French imperialism has helped Washington lay waste to Libya and Syria, economically strangle Iran, and prepare for regional or even global war centered in the Middle East—all of which threaten working people with catastrophe. The NPA, which enthusiastically backed the wars in Libya and Syria, dismisses the impact of lost Iranian sales on PSA to continue supporting unpopular imperialist policies at the expense of workers both in Europe and the Middle East.

When workers in Europe enter struggle against attacks on their jobs and living standards, they will face in the NPA a determined enemy, supporting austerity, capitalist oppression, and imperialist war.



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