

French Socialist Party's austerity program expose bankruptcy of petty-bourgeois "left"

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The austerity policies of the Socialist Party (PS) government of President François Hollande are exposing the bankruptcy of the petty-bourgeois "left" parties, such as the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA), which supported his election.

According to an October 3 report by the daily *Le Monde*, the Elysée presidential palace is preparing a "competitiveness shock" to cut corporate contributions to social spending by €8 billion (US\$10.3 billion) per year, or €40 billion over Hollande's five-year term. The aim is to defend French corporate competitiveness by slashing labor costs—that is, the living standards of the working class.

To make up the slack, taxes are to be increased. This would reportedly hit workers earning between 1.6 and 2.2 times the minimum wage—e.g. in auto and other industrial sectors—particularly hard.

This report emerged as the political establishment prepares for Louis Gallois, the former head of the EADS aerospace-defense corporation, to issue a report on French competitiveness on November 5. Gallois' calls for a "competitiveness shock" are manifestly being taken up by the Elysée before Gallois publishes his report. He is expected to propose a move towards Northern European policies of "flexi-security"—allowing companies to more easily hire and fire workers, cut wages, and reduce working time.

The PS has also supported austerity policies the European Union (EU) is imposing on Greece, and voted yesterday for the pro-austerity European budget treaty.

Hollande's right-wing policies expose yet again the

bankruptcy of France's petty-bourgeois "left" parties, who supported his election in May against right-wing incumbent Nicolas Sarkozy. They argued that Hollande would pursue less aggressive policies and be more easily influenced by popular opposition to austerity.

NPA presidential candidate Philippe Poutou said that a "Hollande ballot" was a "tool to throw out Nicolas Sarkozy" in the May 6 run-off election. As masses of people realize that his policy is not noticeably different from Sarkozy's, Hollande's popularity is plummeting, with 56 percent of the population viewing him unfavorably, according to a recent IFOP poll. Yet he is intensifying plans for attacks on the working class.

This has prompted the NPA to begin issuing tepid criticisms of Hollande, while doing everything to block an independent struggle of the working class against the PS government. They are insisting that all working class opposition to austerity must be politically subordinated to the union bureaucracy, which is negotiating the cuts with Hollande and business organizations and supports Hollande's austerity agenda.

In an October 5 article titled "Competitiveness: towards an anti-social shock", it wrote: "Hollande has announced his Agenda 2014, which means essentially increasing health spending cuts and 'modernizing' the labor market. This series of measures should supposedly produce the 'shock' that the employers want."

In issuing such criticisms of Hollande, the NPA is simply guarding the left flank of a section of the government itself that is concerned at the implications of introducing such measures too rapidly. A mass mobilization of working people in Portugal outraged by

similar cuts last month frightened the conservative Portuguese government into temporarily retracting its measures. (See also: “Largest-ever” demonstrations in Portugal)

On October 8 *Le Monde* reported that “several important government ministers criticized a massive ‘competitiveness shock’ based on cutting corporate contributions, compensated by increasing workers’ contributions or sales taxes, to cut labor costs.”

While alluding to the social consequences of Hollande’s cuts, the NPA does not seek to mount any political struggle of the working class against the cuts and the PS government. Rather, it seeks to boost the negotiating position of the trade union bureaucracy as it organizes the cuts with Hollande. In doing so, the NPA seeks to impose a political straitjacket on working class opposition, confined to the boundaries of the capitalist order.

Speaking of the tripartite government-business-trade union meetings in which the unions are negotiating the cuts with Hollande, the NPA writes: “Participating in such meetings means accepting to work within the framework of social retrogression. This justifies doing everything so that these negotiations will not take place, to block union participation in these discussions.”

It concludes, “More broadly, what is at stake in the coming struggles is whether workers, trade unionists, and activists can force the union movement to break with the policy of negotiation and place itself in opposition to this anti-social government.”

What a bankrupt proposal! The NPA knows, as it advances it, that the unions are both unwilling and incapable of organizing any meaningful opposition to government austerity policies.

The unions are pressing Hollande to accelerate social cuts to promote corporate competitiveness. Recently, French Democratic Labor Confederation (CFDT) union leader François Chérèque said: “our country’s economic situation is bad, because France is not well adjusted to the challenges of globalization. ... We must begin negotiations on labour market reforms as fast as possible”. He signaled his support for wage cuts, saying: “the cost of labor is also a factor in the loss of competitiveness.”

In France, over the past three decades, unions have

negotiated pension cuts, education reforms and factory closures with successive governments of all political colorations.

They are empty shells, populated by a privileged bureaucracy, whose budget—according to the Perruchot report, which was censored by the parliament and then leaked—comes over 90 percent from financial contributions of big business and the state. Members’ dues account for only 3 to 4 percent of their budgets. Such organizations are completely incapable of pursuing a strategy independent of and hostile to big business and to the PS government.

Under these conditions, the NPA’s appeal for the union bureaucracy to pursue a “radical” policy is a political trap for the working class, to encourage workers to place false hopes in the policies of the union bureaucracy. The NPA’s political duplicity reflects the interests of the social layers for whom it speaks—layers of the affluent middle class, large portions of which are politically integrated into the union bureaucracy.

Whatever cynical criticisms they make of Hollande, these affluent layers are not seriously affected by Hollande’s cuts. They can propose a bankrupt strategy time and again, never drawing any political conclusions from the defeat of workers’ struggles against austerity, precisely because they represent a social stratum isolated from and antagonistic to the working class.

This vindicates the criticisms made by the *World Socialist Web Site* at the time of the foundation of the NPA in 2009, pointing out that its petty-bourgeois politics and its rejection of any association to Trotskyism were preparing it for openly entering into the service of bourgeois reaction. (See also: France: What is the LCR’s New Anti-Capitalist Party?)

The only viable way to fight the Hollande administration is to mobilize the working class for a political struggle against the PS government and the European Union (EU), independent of the unions and their hangers-on such as the NPA, based on a revolutionary socialist perspective.



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