

French unions, pseudo-left seek to block opposition to Hollande's cuts

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After France's ruling Socialist Party (PS) announced a pro-business "responsibility pact" consisting of deep cuts in social spending and labour costs, France's unions and pseudo-left parties are intervening to block opposition to the PS and its reactionary policies.

On February 14, the head of the Stalinist General Confederation of Labour (CGT) union, Thierry Lepaon, announced that the CGT would consult with other unions to decide on a joint protest on March 18 on wages and employment. However, he stressed that they did not oppose the "responsibility pact."

"This will not be a day of action against the responsibility pact, but on wages, jobs, and the financing of social security," Lepaon said.

Lepaon's remark is a cynical evasion, aiming to hide the CGT's support for attacks on the working class. PS President François Hollande announced a "responsibility pact" last month, involving €50 billion in cuts to health care, local government, and family subsidies received by millions of working class families. By calling a day of action on wages and social security while stressing that he does not oppose the attack on them, Lepaon has shown that he in fact supports the "responsibility pact."

The March 18 protest will be a dead end for anyone seeking to oppose Hollande's attacks on the working class. Like a series of one-day union protests that workers increasingly are ignoring, such as the latest February 6 protest, they are intended only to let off steam and to hide the unions' role in negotiating and approving anti-worker austerity measures. Workers' struggles against PS cuts can only proceed independently from and against the union bureaucracy and its pseudo-left allies.

The union bureaucracy is doubtless busy studying and negotiating further cuts with employers groups and

the state. This year's budget includes €15 billion euros in spending cuts, with €18 billion, €18 billion, and €17 billion in cuts now slated for budgets in 2015, 2016, and 2017, respectively—in addition to a €30 billion cut in corporate payroll taxes.

The financial markets are demanding that the PS deepen cuts beyond what it has announced so far. Last week, France's national auditor (*Cour des comptes*) called on the PS to reverse the rise in France's public debt, set to top 95 per cent of national income this year.

Cour des comptes president Didier Migaud said: "Any further delay in the consolidation of the public finances will translate into a worrying divergence with our European neighbours, a large amount of new debt and would be a serious blow to the financial credibility of France." He said French debt is in the "danger zone", and that a 1 percent rise in interest rates—which the banks could demand in France, as they did in Greece—would increase annual interest payments on France's debt from €52 billion to €54 billion.

The unions and the middle-class pseudo-left parties are responding to Hollande's shift to the right and the coming wave of attacks on the working class by drawing together and, while making a few *pro forma* complaints, stressing their political loyalty to the PS.

As the CGT pledged its loyalty to the "responsibility pact," the pseudo-left New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) issued a public letter appealing for unity among all the "left" satellites of the PS. It was titled "NPA Open Letter: for a Weekend of Left Revolt."

It declared, "We propose to all the organizations of the political and trade-union left that are not participating in the government coalition, to Non-Governmental Organizations that are fighting to defend social and democratic rights, to get together to act in common."

Among the forces that the NPA is proposing to “act in common” is the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF), a long-time PS ally which historically has dominated the CGT, and which is not technically a part of the PS’ government coalition in parliament. Thus, as the CGT pledges its support for the responsibility pact, the NPA is pledging to align itself with the policies of the CGT.

This testifies to the political bankruptcy of the pseudo-left and portends a coming eruption of class struggles between the workers and the entire political elite. The harsh austerity policies being pursued by Hollande threaten an economic and social disaster, with soaring unemployment. This is in line with the austerity policies pursued by both social-democratic and conservative governments in Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal since the outbreak of the 2008 economic crisis.

In the face of rising anger and opposition in the working class, the pseudo-left groups have backed the social counterrevolution waged by the ruling class throughout Europe. While the ruling class handed over hundreds of billions to the banks and crushed strikes against its austerity measures, the unions blocked broader mobilizations of the working class.

In France, the Stalinists and the NPA praised Hollande’s victory in the 2012 presidential election. Since then, they have issued token protests while closely collaborating with Hollande to oversee pro-business spending cuts and plant shutdowns including PSA-Aulnay and Goodyear-Amiens.

The NPA’s attempts to distance itself from Hollande’s attacks on the working class reek of cynicism and bad faith. Its open letter asserts, “Since Hollande is in power, his entire policy is turned towards the financial markets, the bosses, and the right.”

This underscores the reactionary class role of the NPA itself. It called upon voters to vote unconditionally for Hollande in the 2012 run-off elections against the right-wing incumbent, Nicolas Sarkozy—while simultaneously labelling the PS a “social-free market” organization, reflecting its awareness that Hollande would pursue anti-working class policies.

After Hollande’s election victory, NPA presidential candidate Philippe Poutou praised Hollande, declaring:

“Nicolas Sarkozy, the ‘president of the rich’ is well and truly beaten, and we are glad.... After a campaign that took on an increasingly reactionary turn, the candidate claiming to be the ‘candidate of the people’ was thrown out, and it’s a good thing.”

These claims that Hollande’s election was a “good thing” and a defeat for the rich have been exposed as political lies.



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