

After Paris attacks, New Anti-capitalist Party backs police state rule and war

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In the aftermath of the November 13 terrorist attacks in Paris, the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) is adapting to the state of emergency imposed by France's Socialist Party (PS) government and pressing for stepped-up war in the Middle East. It is signaling its support for the drastic escalation of militarism and attacks on democratic rights planned by the ruling class in France and internationally.

This is the content of its November 27 statement, "The 13 November attacks in Paris: the terror of the Islamic State, the state of emergency in France, our responsibilities," written by François Sabado and Pierre Rousset. Sabado is a longstanding leader and strategist of the NPA and its predecessor, the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR). He played a central role in the dissolution of the LCR and formation of the NPA in a final public break by this organization from any association with socialist politics.

The target of Sabado and Rousset is not the threat of war and dictatorship. Rather, they denounce opponents of imperialist war in Syria, though it is this war that gave birth to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) militia that carried out the Paris attacks.

"Whatever the role of imperialism, the Islamic State is responsible for its actions," the NPA asserts, continuing: "Under the impact of events, left organizations, associations, and unions have caved in to the call for national unity; others, in a reaction against this, have so much emphasized the very real political and historical responsibilities of Western imperialism that the denunciation of the Islamic State has become inaudible."

The claim that criticisms of imperialism are downing out now-inaudible criticisms of ISIS is absurd. Unrestrained law-and-order hysteria and war fever against ISIS and the Syrian regime predominate in the French political establishment—including among the NPA's allies in the Left Front and the trade union bureaucracy. The NPA's main concern is to block any opposition to this from the left.

Sabado and Rousset go on to denounce unnamed left-wing groups that oppose imperialism. They write, "[W]e can still read plenty of articles which consider that although the attacks 'had no excuse,' it was necessary above all to take into account 'the context.' Since the analysis of that context is essentially reduced to the enumeration of imperialist misdeeds, one could conclude that the fundamentalist movements are merely reacting to the actions of the great powers, and we should somehow grant them extenuating circumstances. Strangely enough, many writers on the left vigorously denounce the fundamentalist attacks, but refuse to condemn by name, explicitly, the movements that commit them."

This is a provocation, aimed at intimidating opposition to French imperialism's moves to drag the population into war and dictatorship. Sabado and Rousset do not identify a single article, author or quotation to justify their denunciation of anti-imperialist views. They simply insinuate, without any factual basis, that opposition to imperialism is tantamount to excusing or supporting ISIS.

In the current context, this is a sinister threat. Though Sabado and Rousset pass over it in silence, 100,000 soldiers and police are patrolling France's streets and using the emergency laws to arrest hundreds of people of all descriptions, even ecological protesters, on anti-terror charges.

Their claim that ISIS must be treated in isolation from imperialism aims to disorient the public, hide who is responsible for the Paris attacks, and facilitate the media's pro-war propaganda. ISIS itself emerged from the imperialist powers' reckless attempt to re-colonize the Middle East by means of war, using Islamist militias, including ISIS, as their proxies. While ISIS is responsible for its actions, the imperialist powers are responsible for the emergence of ISIS. The struggle to prevent new atrocities like the November 13 attacks can take the form only of opposition to imperialist war.

The wars waged by imperialism have enjoyed the NPA's enthusiastic support. For years, it has hailed imperialism's proxies as "revolutionaries"—first against Colonel Muammar Gaddafi's regime in the 2011 NATO war in Libya, then in the war in Syria against President Bashar al-Assad's regime. However, it was a group of people from within these Islamist militias, operating under the close surveillance of French intelligence, that ultimately carried out the Paris attacks. Desperate to cover up its own role, the NPA is stoking up the prevailing militarist, law-and-order hysteria.

As the French ruling class seeks to abrogate democratic rights, opposition from the left, felt by millions of people, will find no expression through the existing political organizations. Reactionary organizations of the affluent middle class such as the NPA, which for decades monopolized what passed for "left" politics, support draconian policies against the working class.

The attempts of Sabado and Rousset to posture as critics of emergency rule are shot through with bad faith. Their demoralized comments aim primarily to reassure the population that the PS and its political periphery, including the Left Front and the NPA, still defend democratic rights and the framework of France's Fifth Republic.

"Resistance to the extension of the state of emergency has been very weak in the parliamentary left," they declare, adding, "The state of progressive forces in France is quite disastrous."

Their remark that the situation is "disastrous" is a disingenuous attempt to excuse the NPA's responsibility for what is occurring. Parties like the Left Front and the PS—to which the NPA has oriented itself and with which it has worked for decades, and which it still insists on calling "progressive"—are putting in place a police state in France.

In fact, there was no resistance, "weak" or otherwise, to the state of emergency among the NPA's parliamentary allies. The National Assembly passed the state of emergency 551-6, with 3 PS and 3 Green deputies voting against in a token protest. All the deputies of the Left Front—a coalition that includes the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF), the Left Party (PG), and factions that emerged from the NPA itself,

such as the Unitary Left and Anti-capitalist Left factions, voted for it.

Significantly, the deputies voted this way even though the PS had already said it was seeking a constitutional amendment to allow the president to declare a permanent state of emergency. This allows police to detain individuals, carry out searches and seizures in their homes, assign them to house arrest, and dissolve organizations of which they are members, if their behavior, statements or associations lead police to suspect that they could pose “a threat to security and public order.”

This would signify the transformation of France into a police state. Armed with the tools of modern mass electronic spying, police would have enormous powers to attack anyone, including workers and their organizations, whose views they can interpret as critical, or even potentially critical, of the state’s social or foreign policies. Freedom of opinion would be effectively terminated.

The NPA’s response shows that the “left” establishment is committed to war, dictatorship and the promotion of anti-Muslim hatred to divide the working class. Sabado and Rousset complacently write: “[E]motion has overwhelmed the country, which is, of course, perfectly normal. Islamophobic acts have multiplied, but they are actually committed only by a fringe of the population.”

They demand that full blame for the November 13 attacks be placed on ISIS. That organization, the NPA writes, “has built a proto-state on a territory equivalent to that of Britain.” The statement continues: “It runs an administration; it has accumulated immense wealth (estimated at nearly \$1.8 billion); it organizes the smuggling of oil and cotton. It conducts military operations on multiple fronts; it has recruited IT specialists of the highest level... It is not a puppet! It is responsible for its acts—totally responsible for the attacks committed in so many places.”

This attempt to turn ISIS into an independent economic and military colossus, an enemy the size of Britain or France, is absurd. ISIS emerged from the illegal US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the imperialist proxy wars in the Middle East since 2011, in which Islamist militias funded by the Persian Gulf oil sheikdoms served as ground forces for NATO. If ISIS has indeed amassed \$1.8 billion through its oil trade with Turkey, which is a NATO member state, this would mean that it has less than 0.02 percent of France’s approximately \$12 trillion in national wealth.

The role of the state in the November 13 attacks cannot be discounted, moreover, and Sabado and Rousset do not say what their sources are for their claim that ISIS is “totally” responsible. Long experience has shown that Al Qaeda and ISIS are penetrated by intelligence and subject to manipulation. Only a few months after the *Charlie Hebdo*-Hyper Cacher attacks, it was reported that the shooters received weapons from police informants—a fact that Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve tried to use the state secrets privilege to cover up.

More fundamentally, however, Marxists never explain the significance of a terrorist attack purely from the standpoint of the incident itself. ISIS’ ability to win a hearing among layers of French youth, like French imperialism’s decision to repudiate its anti-Iraq war position in 2003 to instead support NATO wars for regime-change, is bound up with profound changes in class relations.

Since 2003, French capitalism’s socio-economic foundations have been shattered, particularly by the eruption in 2008 of the deepest global capitalist crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Tens of millions of jobs have been slashed, social rights torn up, and vast profits realized by the ruling elite across Europe, yet French capitalism continues to collapse. Unable to compete on world markets, its own economists predict “zero growth” and intensifying social conflict.

In response, the ruling elite has turned to wars of plunder abroad and stepped-up police repression of working class suburbs, particularly Muslim immigrant areas, at home. This goes hand-in-hand with discriminatory measures targeting Muslims—from the ban on wearing the veil in public schools in 2003 to the ban on the burqa in 2009.

Sabado and Rousset want to talk about the responsibility of ISIS, but what is the responsibility of the NPA? How can one explain the absence under these conditions of any anti-war movement in France, or of any left-wing movement that is winning support among youth?

The NPA, the Left Front and their allies have played a deceitful and reactionary role, posing as “left” while backing all of the reactionary policies of French imperialism—the wars, anti-Muslim measures, and the austerity program of a PS government they supported in the 2012 elections. They did everything to create a surreal political atmosphere in which all opposition to war based on the working class was suppressed. This opened the door for ISIS to win a hearing among more disoriented layers of Muslim youth in France.

The NPA, in particular, played a central role as the most aggressive promoter of the wars in Libya and Syria, hailing NATO’s Islamist proxy forces as “revolutionaries.”

As the bombs began to fall, the NPA’s Gilbert Achcar praised the UN resolution authorizing the Libyan war. While admitting that “there are not enough safeguards in the wording of the resolution to bar its use for imperialist purposes,” he said: “But given the urgency of preventing the massacre that would inevitably have resulted from an assault on Benghazi by Gaddafi’s forces, and the absence of any alternative means of achieving the protection goal, no one can reasonably oppose it... You can’t in the name of anti-imperialist principles oppose an action that will prevent the massacre of civilians.”

When NATO air strikes and raids by Islamist and tribal militias brought down the Libyan regime, and Gaddafi was captured, tortured and murdered in the bombed-out ruins of Sirte, the NPA hailed the event. It declared, “The fall of the dictator Gaddafi is good news for the people. The NPA is in full solidarity with the revolutionary process that is continuing in the Arab region.”

As Libya collapsed into a civil war between the various Islamist militias NATO had backed against Gaddafi, Achcar met in October 2011 with the CIA’s Syrian assets to discuss toppling Assad. He boasted in the pages of London’s *Al Akbar* that he had been invited to their conference in Sweden “to speak on the subject of foreign military intervention in the current situation in Syria.”

Islamist fighters assembled for regime-change in Libya were integrated into an international network of training camps to prepare operations against the Assad regime. Under the supervision of the CIA and European intelligence, they were trained to carry out urban guerrilla warfare and car bombings. Police and intelligence services across Europe allowed and encouraged thousands of youth from Muslim origins to go to the Middle East and receive this training.

As dozens of terror bombings hit Syrian cities, the NPA hailed them as part of a revolutionary struggle against Assad, demanding that France arm the Syrian opposition. The NPA’s Olivier Besancenot said in 2013: “[French Foreign Minister Laurent] Fabius is a broken record. He’s said the same thing for months. He should graciously give weapons to the Syrian revolutionaries.”

Besancenot dismissed concerns in the intelligence agencies that this meant arming terrorists: “Those who say, ‘We should above all not give weapons because they will end up with the jihadists,’ well, it is already the case [that they are armed].”

ISIS profited from the Assad regime’s collapse in eastern Syria, with aid from Sunni forces in neighboring Iraq hostile to Washington’s Shia puppet regime in Baghdad. It was able to export oil from these areas to global markets thanks to its links to Turkey, a NATO member state.

When the NATO powers began bombing ISIS in Iraq to prop up the Baghdad regime, the NPA backed them and began denouncing ISIS. But ISIS served as a tool of imperialist policy and a justification for stepped-up war. Last year, Paris still refused to bomb ISIS in Syria, stating that this would aid Assad by removing his strongest opponent.

When ISIS recruits from France and Belgium carried out the terror attacks in Paris, even while under close police surveillance, it was the tragic and bloody outcome of imperialist policies that the NPA had aggressively supported. This was not due to passing confusion or a tactical error by the NPA, but a product of its class character as a petty-bourgeois, pro-imperialist party. This is why, even in their current article, Sabado and Rousset demand the arming of more proxy forces and further military escalation in Syria.

The article points to the “forces on the ground that most deserve our support: the Kurds, the Yezidis, the progressive and secular components of the resistance to the regime. We must give them our political and material solidarity and demand that they receive adequate weapons... It is the peoples who decide, not the imperialist coalitions. But, and this is a particular dimension of this war, the Kurds and the Syrian democrats have asked and continue to ask for medical and military aid, including from Western governments. They must be given it.”

This is a shameless exercise in political sophistry, exploiting the November 13 attacks to give a new “popular” gloss to their support for imperialist war in Syria by the major powers. However, it is not “the peoples” of the Middle East, but the armed forces and intelligence agencies of the NATO states that will decide which opposition militias receive NATO weapons.

As for the imperialist-backed Kurdish militias and the mixture of army deserters, criminal groups and Islamist militias the NPA hails as a “secular” opposition, they no more represent the Middle Eastern masses than does ISIS.

Sabado and Rousset speak for the bedraggled remnants of a petty-bourgeois pseudo-left party, resorting to dishonest phrases to cover up their pro-imperialist agenda and the fact that they are stampeding to the right. The NPA has gone from supporting imperialist war to supporting police-state rule in order to suppress opposition to war.



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