

French strike movement exposes bankruptcy of New Anti-capitalist Party

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The entry of the working class into political struggle against the Socialist Party (PS) government and its regressive labor law marks a historical turning point. As mass strikes against austerity spread not only in France but also in Belgium and against the Syriza (“Coalition of the Radical Left”) government in Greece, in line with rising strikes in the United States and Asia, the working class is demonstrating its vast power. The discredited PS government is tottering.

The emergence of a political movement in the working class is also blowing to pieces the foundations of middle class parties, like France’s New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA), that for decades dominated protest movements. Rejecting the revolutionary role of the working class, they oriented to parties of bourgeois government—in Europe, social democratic parties like the French PS—that they hailed as “left.”

Mass protests in which workers and youth reject the PS’ threadbare claims to be a left-wing or socialist party and demand a defense of basic social and democratic rights against the PS reflect a broad international realignment of class forces. The NPA’s Greek ally, Syriza, took office last year and worked with the European Union (EU) to impose savage austerity measures on the Greek people. The deep class antagonism between the working class and these parties, and the urgent necessity of building a revolutionary alternative to them, is emerging ever more clearly.

The NPA was founded by the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR) shortly after the 2008 Wall Street crash and the outbreak of world capitalism’s deepest economic crisis since the 1930s. In dissolving itself and founding the NPA, the LCR sought to break whatever tenuous association it retained with revolutionary politics. Arguing that there was no basis for building a Trotskyist party in the working class in France, it sought to continue working within the political framework provided by the PS and its allies, such as the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF).

The LCR’s platform for the NPA founding congress stated, “The NPA does not claim a specific relation to Trotskyism, but continuity with those who, over the last two centuries, have confronted the system all the way. The NPA is a pluralistic and democratic party. [There was] participation of comrades from various components of the social movement, of the anti-globalization left, of political ecology, of comrades from the PS and the PCF, from the anarchist movement, from the revolutionary left. Without becoming bland, the NPA has everything to win by opening itself even further.”

The content of the NPA’s relationship with its PS “comrades” soon became apparent. The NPA endorsed PS candidate François Hollande in the 2012 presidential elections, falsely claiming he could be pressured to adopt progressive policies. This went hand in hand with the NPA’s emergence as an open propagandist for imperialist war,

endorsing the NATO war in Libya in 2011 and the arming of NATO-backed “rebels” in Syria on the basis of the lie that they were engaged in a democratic revolution.

Anger mounted in the working class with Hollande’s austerity policies, and NATO’s imperialist interventions posed ever more directly the danger of a military clash with nuclear-armed Russia. Nonetheless, even when it acknowledged the deepening political crisis, the NPA insisted ever more aggressively that it was impossible to build a revolutionary leadership in the working class.

In a 2013 book reviewing the evolution of postmodernist and anarchist philosophy since the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, titled *Left Hemisphere*, Sorbonne university Professor and NPA member Razmig Keucheyan wrote: “The current world, with all its noise, resembles the world in which classical Marxism emerged. In other respects, however, it is very different, above all because of the absence of clearly identified ‘subject of emancipation.’ The Marxist of the beginning of the last century could count on powerful workers organizations, which they often led, whose activities were supposed to overcome what was then presented as a final crisis of capitalism. Nothing similar exists currently, nor is it likely to exist in the near future.”

Professor Keucheyan went on to make clear that, in his view, the leading force in society is the affluent middle class, that is, the social base of the NPA itself. Combining arrogance with absurdity, he wrote, “Today’s Lenin, Trotsky, and Rosa Luxemburg are academics who typically carry out their activities in establishments that are highly rated on international markets.”

The initial struggles of the working class against the PS government have dealt a devastating blow to such reactionary, anti-Marxist politics. In a recent article, “Strong Headwinds are Making France a Stormy Sea,” the NPA’s Léon Crémieux all but admits that they have suffered a total shipwreck.

He writes, “[T]he management of capitalist interests by social democracy, weak political opposition to the left of the PS and the lethargy of the union leaderships were not synonymous with an equivalent lethargy and drift of the whole of society, starting with a large section of workers and young people, hit hard by policies of austerity and unemployment. On the contrary; the situation already gave an illustration of the profound alienation from and discredit of the institutional parties, who have alternated in government over the last twenty years.”

The inescapable conclusion of Crémieux’s analysis is that it is the working class, not the PS’ allies in the NPA and the union bureaucracies, that is the leading force in the struggle against austerity. The NPA’s historical perspective of promoting “left”

bourgeois parties as socialist, while rejecting the construction of a Marxist political vanguard in the working class, was completely false.

This perspective was not simply an error, however. It was rooted in material class interest hostile to the proletariat which the NPA and similar forces internationally represent. This is particularly clear in Greece: Syriza is trying to stabilize the financial system and preserve the bank accounts of the Greek bourgeoisie and upper middle class by imposing EU austerity, utterly betraying its election promises to end austerity, in the face of mass opposition in the working class.

The central question that is facing the working class is that raised by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI): development of a revolutionary Marxist leadership in the working class opposed to the bankrupt politics of petty-bourgeois anti-Marxism. Workers in France, Belgium and internationally must be told the truth. As they escalate their struggles, this situation will pose ever more urgently the question of revolutionary leadership and political power.

The European bourgeoisie, staggered by the economic crisis and determined to step up its plundering operations overseas, is determined to impose austerity at all costs to finance its profits and its rising military spending. The PS labor law is the transposition in France of the attacks carried out by the EU in Greece or in Germany with the Social-Democratic Party's (SPD) Hartz laws. The labor law was in fact drafted with input from Peter Hartz, who drafted the Hartz laws, and Hollande is coordinating his strategy against the protests with leading social-democratic politicians in Germany, Italy, Portugal and beyond.

The Stalinist General Confederation of Labor (CGT) union has called numerous strikes in an attempt to avoid being outflanked by escalating struggles in the working class. However, it offers nothing to the working class. It will prove impotent and hostile to the workers in a protracted struggle against the PS government.

CGT leader Philippe Martinez is loudly declaring that he is in secret back-channel talks with Hollande, signaling that he does not want to interrupt the upcoming Euro 2016 football cup with strikes, and backpedaling on earlier claims that he wants Hollande to withdraw the labor law.

There is widespread distrust of the CGT among workers. Even the NPA—a longtime defender of the CGT—felt compelled to place question marks over its endorsement of the CGT's strategy, writing: "Has the CGT decided to support a strategy of confrontation with the state, pushing the rail workers to join the movement? Thus, in the context of rising strikes led by refinery workers, the CGT's position could change the situation and be an important element of a powerful entry of the rail workers into struggle."

Claims that workers can rely on the CGT to fight Hollande are either the product of ignorance or, in the case of the NPA, conscious deception. Hollande has consistently insisted that he will not back down on the key parts of the law. Having mobilized tens of thousands of paramilitary police and riot squads to assault youth protesters, he is preparing to mobilize these forces to crush whatever opposition in the working class he cannot control.

As for the CGT, it is preparing yet another of its many sellouts of workers struggles against austerity in the post-Soviet period: the railway strikes of 1995 and 2007 against pension cuts, the 2003 teachers' strike and the 2010 oil strike. After all of these struggles, the austerity measures were imposed either in large part or in their entirety, while the NPA covered the reactionary role of the CGT.

A protracted class struggle has only begun to unfold, in France as in

other countries around the world. Three-quarters or more of the French people oppose the law, and deeply rooted traditions are driving the working class to defend social and democratic rights won in struggle by generations of European workers during the 20th century. Yet there is no way forward for the working class in the present political system, on a national basis.

Voting out the PS and replacing it with another major bourgeois party, be it the right-wing The Republicans (LR) or the neo-fascist National Front (FN), would only escalate attacks on the social and democratic rights of the population. These basic rights can only be defended through the revolutionary mobilization of the working class, the bringing down of the PS government and its replacement with a workers state. The allies of the French workers in this struggle are workers of Europe and the world, who are themselves entering into struggles with revolutionary implications.

This requires first and foremost a conscious and ruthless political break with pseudo-left parties such as the NPA.

The central question posed to the working class in France and in every country is the building of the revolutionary party to advance this perspective in the working class and offer it revolutionary leadership in these coming struggles. The ICFI advances itself as the political alternative for the working class, based on the unbroken continuity of its struggle for Trotskyism against the pseudo-left, including in France its relentless opposition to the PS and its satellites like the NPA.

The current political crisis in France has vindicated the ICFI's criticisms of the pseudo-left parties. It is ever more obvious that the NPA worked over a period of decades, since the founding of the PS shortly after the 1968 general strike, to defend the PS—which was not the democratic socialist alternative to the PCF, but a brutal party of finance capital—and to attack Marxism and block the development of a revolutionary leadership in the working class.

This was acknowledged by Hollande himself in his campaign in 2012, when he told a meeting of London bankers, "Today there are no more communists in France. The left liberalized the economy and opened markets to finance and privatization. There is nothing to fear."

The class struggle brooks no interruption, however. The PS and its pseudo-left parties have proven to be enemies of the working class. A central task facing the ICFI is the construction of sections in France and in all countries where it does not currently have sections, to offer the political perspective and revolutionary leadership to the working class that will prove decisive in the coming class struggles.



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