

French “yellow vest” protests expose anti-worker role of New Anticapitalist Party

Alex Lantier**31 December 2018**

The emergence of France’s “yellow vest” protests has unmasked the reactionary role of the New Anticapitalist Party (NPA). Its reaction to the first mass eruption of workers’ opposition to President Emmanuel Macron was unambiguously hostile. The NPA lined up with official propaganda, which began by denouncing the “yellow vest” protesters as anti-environmental racists and fascists for opposing Macron’s fuel tax increase.

Before the first scheduled protest, the NPA published a statement titled “Social justice: we can’t make ourselves heard on November 17.” It declared that “this mobilization is problematic.” It continued: “First of all because even before being the expression of popular discontent, this protest expresses above all an old demand of the trucking companies.”

Pointing to attempts by neo-fascist parties to intervene on “yellow vest” Facebook pages, it swore unyielding hostility to the protests:

We will make no mistake. Like the CGT and Solidarity trade unions, we will not mix our anger on Saturday, November 17, with the bosses’ maneuvers exploited by the far-right, which is not a temporary ally but a mortal enemy. Yes, everything is going up except wages, and the lower classes are right to have had enough with price rises for fuel and in general... But we cannot say it on Saturday, November 17, in actions or supposedly citizens’ gatherings that look like far-right mobs, in which we would line up with the deadliest enemies of the workers’ movement.

What followed was the greatest mobilization of political opposition in the French working class since the May 1968 general strike. Hundreds of thousands of workers,

retirees, unemployed workers, self-employed people and small businessmen defied a crackdown by riot police and armored cars in protests that shook the Macron government to its foundations. This came as protests against social inequality spread across Europe, from student protests in Albania to public-sector strikes in Portugal.

While the NPA and affiliated unions were hostile to the “yellow vests,” the protests gave voice to unprecedented mass anger against the affluent middle class layers in the pseudo-left parties and the unions. When the WSWS asked his opinion of these forces, one “yellow vest” construction worker from Picardy concisely summed it up: “They’re criminals. You could be dying on the street with your mouth open and they would do nothing.”

As the “yellow vests” were extremely popular, the NPA was forced to make a 180-degree turn.

Two weeks after the November 17 protests, NPA leader and former 1968 student leader Alain Krivine spoke at a public meeting in Tours. Barely hiding his disdain, he endorsed the protesters his party had previously slandered as a “far-right mob,” but still slandered them as racist and sexist, declaring: “I think we should support the ‘yellow vests,’ not uncritically, because we must struggle against all the racist, homophobic and sexist behavior we have had occasion to hear about. But a united social front must emerge from this revolt to produce a general strike, where all struggles come together.”

The reference to a “united social front” was a signal for the NPA to call on the Stalinist General Confederation of Labor (CGT) to try to take control of the “yellow vests” and stampede them into a campaign for a toothless, one-day national protest strike.

On December 3, the NPA website *Révolution permanente* appealed to the CGT bureaucracy. The article, titled “The CGT can no longer turn its back on the yellow vest movement,” criticized the CGT’s attacks on the

“yellow vests”—which the NPA had hailed a few weeks before—as “splitterism.” It warned that a movement in the working class could erupt:

In this explosive social situation, the state and big business fear a harder struggle and above all the spread of the movement. With the movement in the high schools, this fear is intensified. The specter of contagion to the workers movement is in everyone’s minds. In this context, union officials and basis structures must not be silent. The government is isolated, weakened and sitting on a powder keg. Every official must demand that the CGT not only call for but organize with all its strength a one-day general strike.

Fifty years after the 1968 general strike, amid the discrediting of Macron and the European Union, a general strike is indeed on workers’ minds across Europe. However, one point is critical: the emerging movement of the working class and a true general strike are as different from the CGT and NPA’s symbolic one-day national protest strike as day and night.

The NPA’s call for the CGT to work with the “yellow vests” to develop their struggle is phony. The unions have no authority over the “yellow vests,” who despise the bureaucracy. More importantly, the CGT is hostile to the “yellow vests” and does not want protests against Macron, especially when his government hangs by a thread. The only purpose the NPA’s call serves is to stabilize Macron by promoting what few illusions remain that the CGT will organize action against him, thus encouraging workers to line up behind the unions’ inaction.

The way to prepare for the coming struggles is to take the fight out of the hands of the unions. The decision of “yellow vests” in Commercy and elsewhere to set up popular assemblies is a critical example: workers across Europe need rank-and-file bodies independent of the unions to prosecute their struggles. The Parti de l’égalité socialiste (PES), the French section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), stresses that as its struggles develop, the working class in Europe will be obliged to transfer political power to such organs.

Above all, this movement has exposed the crisis of revolutionary leadership in the working class. The NPA, founded in 2009 by the former “Trotsko-Guevarist” 1968

student leaders of the Ligue communiste révolutionnaire (LCR), is not a Trotskyist party. The Pabloite LCR was built by forces that had broken with the ICFI in 1953 on the false and nationalist perspective that Stalinists and bourgeois nationalists, instead of the Trotskyist movement, could serve as a revolutionary leadership of the working class.

They oriented in France to forces like the Stalinist CGT which, when it still retained a mass base in the working class, sold out three general strikes: 1936, 1953 and 1968. The LCR itself was shaped by the petty-bourgeois anti-Marxist lifestyle politics of the post-1968 period, and oriented to the big business Socialist Party founded in 1971. After decades of austerity backed by Stalinist and Pabloite groups in Europe following the Stalinist restoration of capitalism in the USSR in 1991, the antagonism between these petty-bourgeois organizations and the workers has emerged for all to see.

In a recent interview with the Chinese magazine *Borderless* posted on the NPA’s International Viewpoint website, Pierre Rousset claims that the NPA’s hostility to the “yellow vests” was just a mistake. Reviewing parties that made statements favorable to the “yellow vests,” he adds: “After some initial hesitation (the time to understand what was happening), the PCF (French Communist Party), the NPA and some of the other leftist forces did the same. The bulk of the labor movement has remained at least ‘distant.’”

This is yet another fraud. The NPA’s hostility to the “yellow vests” was not a mistake caused by passing confusion, but the expression of class forces. As its initial statement made clear, the NPA knew that the “yellow vests” reflected opposition to Macron in the “lower classes.” On this basis, it opposed the “yellow vests.”

The PES alone in France continues the struggle for Trotskyism. The NPA and its allies are petty-bourgeois counter-revolutionaries.



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