NPA attacks “leftist” opposition to French union bureaucracy’s talks with Macron

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In 1953, a split took place in the Trotskyist movement between the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and a faction led by Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel. The Pabloites rejected the independent political role of the working class and asserted that the Stalinist bureaucracy would be compelled to lead revolutionary struggles. Seventy years later, as an objectively revolutionary confrontation emerges between the French working class and President Emmanuel Macron, the implications of this split are emerging very clearly.

Amid the largest strikes in France since the May 1968 general strike, the Parti de l’égalité socialiste (PES), the ICFI’s French section, insists that since Macron is trying to rule against the people, he must be brought down by a general strike. As the union bureaucracies carry out “mediation” with Macron to prop up his government, the PES insists that the preparation of a general strike cannot be left in their hands. The rank and file must mobilize independently to prepare a general strike, on a socialist and revolutionary perspective.

The New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA), the French Pabloite party, is diametrically opposed to this perspective. Its lead article, titled “Pensions: a week of chaos, to go towards victory?” and written by Antoine Larrache, denounces opposition to the union bureaucracy as “sectarian” and criticized “leftist” and “revolutionary” slogans against Macron.

About the NPA’s proposals for action, Larrache writes, “There is no simple solution. One thing is certain, incantations of a general strike to denounce the union leadership are not enough. To fight for the general strike, yes, that shows a right perspective, but to do it in a sectarian way plays a negative role, as it denies the difficulties of the movement and creates ruptures within it.”

The “rupture” in the movement is not due to left-wing criticism of the union bureaucracy, but to the union bureaucracy’s treachery against the rank and file.

According to polls that are worriedly reported by the bourgeois press, 80 percent of the French population are opposed to Macron’s pension cuts, while two-thirds of the respondents support a general strike to “block the economy” and stop its implementation. Another poll indicated that 62 percent of the French people wanted the protest movement to take harder measures against the Macron government.

Rejecting the overwhelming popular demand for mass action, the leadership of France’s CFDT and CGT unions, on the other hand, announced last week that they would enter “mediation” discussions with Macron behind closed doors.

The NPA is emerging as a determined defender of reactionary forces in the union apparatus. They oppose “sectarian” criticisms of the bureaucracies, as such criticism “plays a negative role” in the latter’s efforts to strangle the movement against Macron.

Calls for a general strike, the NPA claims, are nothing but quasi-religious “incantations” completely unrelated to political reality. This is what the NPA implies in another passage, which reads: “The battle for the general strike is a struggle in which we must propose what advances the movement *as it is*, taking into account class consciousness *as it is*, not as it is dreamed of.”

Such an approach is—taken at face value—completely anti-Marxist. Marxists seek to raise the existing consciousness of the workers and not to adapt to it. But what the NPA adapts to is not the consciousness of the working class, which overwhelmingly wants a general strike, but to the trade union bureaucracy, which does not.

Insofar as the statement implies that the level of class consciousness “as it is” does not allow at present to fight for a general strike to bring down Macron, this is nothing but a self-serving lie refuted by the polls: In another Ifop survey published by *Le Journal du Dimanche*, 76 percent of respondents indicated that the pension reform events “had left them with a bad opinion of Macron.”

The perspective of the PES to stop the pension cuts and bring down Macron in a general strike is not one that—in the words of the NPA—can only be “dreamed of,” but one supported by a majority of the French people. Macron has fully demonstrated his hostility towards the masses and his contempt for democratic rights, even ramming through his hated reforms without a vote in the National Assembly. The fight against Macron, the capitalist state machine and the dictatorship of the banks is the decisive issue of the current situation.

But for the NPA, this class confrontation stands “in the background.” The movement, the article argues, should be

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mainly characterized by “sectoral claims, regarding women, wages, public services, unemployment insurance, the Darmanin law, the ecological transition, the private irrigation reservoirs. And, in the background, a fight against the power of Macron, his police, the bosses.”

The “role of political activists,” Larrache and the NPA insist, must be to “make the link between all the events to accelerate maturation and awareness. Without leftism, without shouting ‘we are determined and revolutionary’ at every street corner, but with the aim of involving the masses in political action.”

In other words, the NPA’s ostensible preoccupation with preventing a “rupture” within the movement in practice comes down to an attempt to suppress “leftism” and “revolutionaries” and thus prevent the workers from breaking free of the diktat of the bureaucracies.

Ultimately, the NPA demands that after weeks of determined struggle—in which workers received no strike pay and were brutally attacked by riot police—nothing should be done to prevent Berger, Martinez and Co. from selling out the struggle. Any attempt to free the movement from the bureaucrats’ class-collaborationist perspective, for the NPA, is inadmissible. Its pompous phrases about promoting “maturation and awareness” and “involving masses in political action” simply preach submission to pro-Macron bureaucrats.

The NPA’s call to oppose “leftism” in the mass movement marks another milestone in the right-wing evolution of this pseudo-left, pro-imperialist party of the petty bourgeoisie. In 2009, it was founded by Pabloite cadres of the Ligue communiste révolutionnaire (LCR) based on an explicit repudiation of any historical link to Trotskyism. Its founding program asserted that it was impossible to build a revolutionary party, and that they would therefore build a broad alliance of forces that reject socialist revolution:

> 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 has been] 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.

Having rejected the perspective of building a revolutionary Trotskyist party in the working class, they proceeded to build a counterrevolutionary party. Their calls for alliance with the Parti socialiste (PS), a longstanding party of capitalist government for whom Macron served as economy minister before becoming president, underscored their organic ties to imperialism.

Indeed, in the years that followed, the NPA endorsed NATO wars against Libya and Syria, which cost hundreds of thousands of lives. After applauding the right-wing “Maidan” coup in Ukraine, which in 2014 toppled the elected president and brought far-right parties to power, the NPA demanded further military interventions against Russia. Since the Russian military’s reactionary invasion of Ukraine, the NPA has doubled down on its support for the reactionary Ukrainian military, demanding that NATO arm Ukraine.

The implications of the NPA’s anti-Trotskyist perspective are now emerging ever more evidently in the class struggle inside France itself. Having rejected the struggle to build a revolutionary Trotskyist party, it is now openly hostile to “leftist” criticism of the union bureaucracies and their corrupt maneuvers to smother the struggle against Macron.

The PES is advancing a perspective to bring down Macron via a general strike, linking this demand to a struggle against imperialist war and for socialism. It advocates building independent, rank-and-file committees in every school and workplace to link up the struggle against Macron with the struggles of workers around the world and help them break free of the diktat of the bureaucracies in their countries. Already, mass strikes are developing in Germany, Britain, Portugal, Belgium, Israel and across the world.

Together with their class brothers and sisters internationally, workers in France can bring down Macron and the capitalist oligarchy he represents. But this requires a conscious struggle against the union bureaucracy and its pseudo-left defenders, like the NPA. The PES will do everything in its power to assist workers in this political struggle and calls on workers and youth who agree with this perspective to contact it today.

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