

Gabon coup: Morenoites deny growing opposition to French imperialism

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The series of coups in Africa in nations of the former French colonial empire is unfolding amid a growing radicalization among workers and youth on the continent. After a decade of relentless NATO-led wars in Libya, Mali, and the current conflict in Ukraine involving Russia, there is mounting opposition to neocolonial regimes aligned with France. The rise in anti-imperialist sentiment, calling for the withdrawal of French military presence in Africa, has profound revolutionary implications.

This situation reveals the class gulf separating the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and its French party, the Socialist Equality Party (PES), from “pseudo-left” factions like the Morenoite group “Permanent Revolution” (RP), which has ties to the Pabloite New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA).

RP’s response to the Gabonese coup ignores the working-class anger across Africa directed at French imperialism and its involvement in the Sahel region. RP presents the Gabonese coup as merely a result of power struggles within the Gabonese bourgeoisie, divorcing it from the broader movement of strikes and protests against wars and French imperialist interventions in the Sahel, which are resonating throughout West Africa.

In his article titled “Coup d’état in Gabon: ‘End of regime’ or attempt to avoid a social explosion?”, RP writes: “It is another coup in French imperialism’s backyard, though it appears driven more by internal socio-economic and political tensions than direct discontent related to French presence.”

For decades, French oil companies have exploited Gabon’s resources, yet RP dismisses any connection between this exploitation and the strikes and demonstrations in Mali, Niger, and other countries, demanding the departure of French troops from these resource-rich nations. Escalating social protests and political instability, Alcoy argued, must be attributed to

the interests of the bourgeoisie:

It is possible that a segment of the national bourgeoisie perceives Ali Bongo’s government as an obstacle or even a destabilizing factor. Some refer to this as a “Palace coup,” potentially channeling popular outrage by ousting the president while preserving the core of the regime. The military’s subsequent actions and their ability to quell widespread discontent remain uncertain.

The coup led by General Bryce Oligui Nguma, head of the Gabonese now ex-dictator Ali Bongo’s bodyguard, aims to suppress mass discontent, not oppose imperialism. Initially Bongo attempted to consolidate power in a contested presidential election. The army officer corps feared an uprising against Bongo and a political crisis in Gabon. The coup it launched represents the reaction of a faction of the ruling elites to the radicalization of workers, youth, and oppressed rural masses.

In contrast, RP downplays the opposition to French imperialism, suggesting that there is no objectively revolutionary situation in West Africa. RP functions as a passive observer, waiting to see if the Gabonese military can channel working class protests within a purely national, pro-capitalist context.

This stance is aligned with RP’s position in France during the struggle against Macron’s pension cuts this spring. Millions of workers and youth were mobilized, with two-thirds of the French population in favor of stopping the economy with a general strike to bring down Macron, but RP declared the situation was non-revolutionary. It called to support workers and youth in France and Europe to navigate bourgeois representative democracy.

RP thus denies the emerging revolutionary situation both in Africa and France, including the need to unify and politically mobilize workers in struggle against imperialism. The Morenoite group has adopted the name “Permanent Revolution,” borrowing it from Leon Trotsky’s theory that guided the October 1917 Russian revolution. Yet this is deeply dishonest: Alcoy and RP’s conclusions are diametrically opposed to the revolutionary internationalist perspective of Lenin, Trotsky, and the Bolsheviks. On the theory of Permanent Revolution, Trotsky wrote in June 1905:

Capitalism has intertwined all countries economically and politically, making the world a single entity. This gives current events an international character, opening vast horizons. The political emancipation of Russia under working-class leadership will elevate this class to unprecedented historical heights, leading to the overthrow of world capitalism, whose objective conditions have been met.

Trotsky’s analysis exposes RP’s pro-capitalist stance. The opposition of the working class and African masses against French imperialism shortly after an initial mass mobilization against Macron in France open broad revolutionary horizons. RP, however, obstructs the socialist and internationalist unity of working-class struggles in Africa, France, and worldwide, seeking to divide workers along national lines.

Alcoy’s analysis claiming the absence of opposition to French imperialism in Gabon is false and contradicted by another RP analysis written by Claudi Cinatti, published shortly afterward. Cinatti reluctantly acknowledges the presence of opposition to French imperialism in Gabon. However, she again attributes it mainly to the ruling elites. Cinatti writes:

The impromptu military junta dissolved Congress and the Supreme Court, detaining Bongo, his family, and cabinet members on various charges. Gabon, like other French-speaking African nations, witnessed expressions of support and jubilation during Bongo’s fall, accompanied by slogans denouncing French neocolonialism and its local elite allies.

Cinatti goes on to argue that the policies of African coup leaders are setting the stage for mass mobilization in Africa:

While these African coup leaders are not “anti-imperialists” and are seeking improved terms by aligning with the capitalist bloc of Russia and China, the fact that they employ anti-colonial rhetoric to legitimize themselves signals that geopolitical contradictions and rivalries can ignite mass movements.

Cinatti thus lauds the role of African coup leaders who, through alliances with Moscow and Beijing, allegedly pursue an anti-imperialist agenda, rallying a discontented population that lacks a clear anti-imperialist stance.

This distortion by RP of events in Africa is particularly absurd when applied to Gabon. It implies that the former head of the Bongo’s dictatorship’s guard is spearheading a mass movement against imperialism. But the Bongo regime historically was a neocolonial tool of French imperialism.

RP’s misrepresentation of the Gabonese crisis stems from its Pabloite origins. For over a decade, RP members operated within the NPA, which descends from the petty-bourgeois forces led by Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel, who abandoned Trotskyism and the ICFI 70 years ago. In 1953, Pablo and Mandel argued that Stalinist and bourgeois nationalist forces, rather than Trotskyism, would provide revolutionary leadership since the working class had lost its independent political role.

In reality, the bourgeois leaders of the African coups have nothing to offer workers, just as French union bureaucracies have nothing to offer to workers battling Macron in France. The decisive task is to build an international movement against imperialist war among the working class and youth, unifying it across Africa, Europe, and beyond, aiming to bring down capitalist governments and transfer power to the international working class.



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