

France's Lutte Ouvrière backs New Popular Front as it seeks alliance with Macron

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The surge of the far-right National Rally (RN) party and the collapse of President Emmanuel Macron's Ensemble in the first round of snap parliamentary elections on June 30 is exposing the bankruptcy of the middle class pseudo-left Lutte Ouvrière (LO, Workers Struggle) party. LO serves as a cog in the political machine the French ruling class has set up to tie workers to Macron, a banker who rules against the people.

LO is endorsing the New Popular Front (NFP) alliance created by Jean-Luc Mélenchon. The NFP is an alliance of parties, including Mélenchon's France Unbowed, the big-business Socialist Party (PS), the Stalinist French Communist Party, the Greens and the Pabloite New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA). In LO's July 1 editorial titled, "There is no way out besides a revolutionary communist workers party," LO spokeswoman Nathalie Arthaud writes:

So it is excluded that a class-conscious worker can vote RN. It is obviously out of the question to vote for a candidate endorsed by Macron, who has trampled upon the workers. LO voters may want to vote for a candidate of the New Popular Front alliance against the RN. If this is the case, they can do so without feeling upset.

As for those who do not want to give a free pass to the candidates of the left, including ex-ministers and ex-presidents, they can also without feeling guilty not go vote, and in this way express their distrust of the entire political caste of the bourgeoisie and the state institutions.

This is a cynical attempt to hide LO's orientation to the reactionaries in the NFP and, in the final analysis, to Macron himself. One cannot call for opposition to Macron but support for the NFP. Indeed, the NFP is cutting electoral deals with Macron's Ensemble in order to form a coalition government with Macron after Sunday's second round of the elections.

LO declines to endorse the NFP because it is well aware that if such a government is formed, its policies will provoke massive popular opposition.

What does it mean when Arthaud says workers can "without

feeling upset" vote for NFP "ex-ministers and ex-presidents," who make up the "political caste of the bourgeoisie"? The NFP program calls for sending weapons and French troops to Ukraine for war with Russia and to build up the French military police and intelligence services. It means LO is not "upset" with the program of imperialist war abroad and class war at home advanced by NFP reactionaries like PS ex-President François Hollande.

Arthaud sweeps this under the rug, pointing to the danger posed by the NFP's far-right rivals. She refers to the massive rise in the neo-fascist vote, with 11 million people including a staggering 57 percent of manual workers voting for the RN and its allies. This is more than double its vote in the first round of legislative elections in 2022, when the RN obtained 4 million votes. She says:

In the absence of a true working class party, the working people are getting lost in the search for a savior from on high who does not exist. They long looked for this savior from on high on the left. ... Today many workers are seeing it in the National Rally. It is a mortal road for the working class to follow.

What a devastating self-indictment! It has been a half-century since LO came to prominence in the 1974 presidential campaign of Arlette Laguiller. For decades, top LO officials have had broad access to mass media and garnered millions of votes. Yet LO proved incapable of building anything and now argues, as millions of outraged and embittered workers vote for the neo-fascists, that a "true working class party" does not exist. Indeed, LO is a party of middle class bureaucracies, not the workers.

Arthaud does not even ask, let alone answer, why manual workers now prefer the RN to parties like the PS, the PCF and the NPA, with which LO has worked for decades. But over this entire period, what passed for "left" politics, beyond social democratic and Stalinist parties of capitalist government, were petty-bourgeois renegades from Trotskyism who allied with them. Waging imperialist wars and imposing austerity policies

while in power, they also strangled workers' struggles against these policies.

In order to explain LO's role in the rise of the RN, it is worth quoting Laguiller's 2016 interview with the WSWs. Asked why working class membership in the unions was collapsing, Laguiller replied: "I think a lot of struggles were betrayed. A lot of workers are angry over struggles they waged where finally the trade unions pushed them back to work without obtaining a victory. So there is all that anger."

When the WSWs asked if these sellouts were related to LO's role in the union bureaucracies and the fact that these bureaucracies are funded mostly by the state and the employers, she replied: "It is normal when you are a revolutionary communist to at least do trade union work. ... I don't think the problem is the financing. Of course, it would be healthier if the parties, if the trade unions, if everybody were financed by contributions by their members. Of course, that's true, too. But here we are."

Bought-and-paid-for organizations like LO have ceaselessly worked to block a struggle of the working class against the rise of the far right. This emerged flagrantly during the 2002 election crisis. At that point, due to the collapse of the vote for pro-austerity PS candidate Lionel Jospin, a run-off emerged between the neo-fascist Jean-Marie Le Pen and the right-wing candidate, incumbent President Jacques Chirac.

The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), the leadership of the world Trotskyist movement, intervened decisively. It issued an open letter, calling on all organizations claiming to defend the working class to reject the fraudulent run-off between two reactionary defenders of capitalism and called for an active boycott of the run-off. It explained that a campaign for a boycott in the working class, rejecting the lie that workers could rely on Chirac to defend democracy against Le Pen, would best prepare workers to struggle against whichever candidate won.

Though they had obtained collectively more than 3 million votes in the 2002 elections, LO and the Pabloites refused such a policy. Initially, they both lined up directly behind the official campaign for Chirac.

After the publication of the ICFI's open letter, LO ended up taking the position of calling on voters to go to the polls and vote blank or invalid. LO did not want to run a public campaign to build a movement in the working class and youth, mobilizing its massive voting base. It clearly feared that this would undermine the funding of its positions in the trade union apparatus by the state and the employers and LO's links with the PS.

LO's refusal to mount any significant opposition to the campaign for a Chirac vote effectively ceded the mantle of political opposition to the existing order to the far right. This is the policy that it continues to employ today, seeking to tie workers to Mélenchon as he tries to tie the workers to Macron.

The neo-fascist RN has exploited the vacuum created by the

resulting absence of any challenge to capitalism to cynically pose as the defenders of the French people. It works to divert social discontent along right-wing, anti-immigrant and nationalist channels. Despite its cynical populist posturing, it poses a dangerous fascistic threat. It has already signaled that it will rule as a reactionary party of war and fascistic police-state repression, calling to fund the war economy while threatening to ban strikes.

Arthaud concludes her present article by arguing that not all will be lost, whatever the outcome of the elections. The working class, she argues in a pedantic and unserious invocation of Marxism, must exist because the capitalist class cannot obtain profits without exploiting labor. The workers, she writes,

are at the heart of production, transport, commerce, banks, public services. The bosses need us, and that gives us the means to struggle and to make them respect us. ... In the past, the working class has carried out great struggles. It is based on this rich history that we must build a true communist workers party, revolutionary and internationalist!

This is a criminally light-minded approach to the enormous dangers posed by the present crisis. Macron is threatening to invoke Article 16 of the French constitution, which would allow him to suspend parliament and the government and rule as a dictator. The RN and the NFP are supporting Macron's war economy measures to escalate the war against Russia, defending the Gaza genocide.

The working class is indispensable to the capitalists to obtain profits, but this does not mean workers can be indifferent to the threats of Macron and Le Pen to impose fascistic police state rule or the threat of nuclear war with Russia. LO's call to not be "upset," in this context, is monumentally complacent. The working class must be mobilized in political struggle against imperialist war, fascism and capitalism.

A political struggle for Trotskyism against petty-bourgeois parties like LO is critical to building such a movement. Defending democratic rights and opposing war requires the mobilization of rank-and-file workers, independently of the union bureaucracies tied to LO. The basis for such a struggle is the defense of Trotskyism against the pseudo-left by the ICFI and its French section, the *Parti de l'égalité socialiste*.



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