

France: After the National Conference of the NPA

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The French New Anticapitalist Party (NPA) held a national conference to prepare the 2012 presidential election. Below, four related items.

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National Conference of the NPA: a campaign faced with the crisis of the system

Jean-Francois Cabral, Sandra Demarcq

The national conference of the NPA brought together 240 delegates, elected by the 3,100 members who had voted in 92 local aggregate meetings. The purpose of the conference was to decide the NPA's approach to the upcoming elections, presidential and legislative. The vote of the members gave a majority of 50.4 per cent to Motion A, thus deciding to launch our presidential campaign without putting our candidature in parentheses.

On Saturday, the first debate began around our approach to the elections. The principal divergence between the delegates of Position A and those of Position B (40 per cent of the delegates) related to the strategy of the NPA towards the Left Front. Position C (5.8 per cent of the delegates) considered that the approach proposed by Position A has was not sufficiently revolutionary.

The general profile of the campaign

The discussions on Saturday afternoon centred on the profile and the main lines of our campaign. As a result of these discussions, broad agreement took shape around the idea that our campaign should respond to the crisis of the capitalist system and its consequences for the population and the working class. This crisis, which is at the same time economic, financial, social, environmental, energy and food, has disastrous effects. Faced the with governments of both right and left which orchestrate the austerity plans in the service of the ruling classes, the need to give our social camp the confidence that is necessary to fight back is a common preoccupation. But differences have arisen on the way that this campaign should be conducted. Some comrades of Position B are afraid that there will be a "workerist and sectarian" campaign and the comrades of Position C are worried

that there will be a campaign which would not refer sufficiently to measures of a break with capitalism.

On Saturday evening, our comrade Philippe Poutou was designated as presidential candidate of the NPA by 122 For, 50 Against, 11 Abstentions and 47 NPPV (did not take part in the vote). [1] Some comrades in particular were opposed because they considered it regrettable that our candidate is not a woman, in particular one of our two spokespersons. But a majority considered that the social and political profile of Philippe illustrated best the project of our organization during this crisis period of capitalism and made it possible to unite the party.

The launching of the campaign

On Sunday, the discussions in workshops made it possible to deepen the various axes of our campaign : working conditions, sharing out of work, jobs and precarious work, wages, ecology, discriminations, cancellation of the debt, youth... As an anti-capitalist organization, we want to link the defence of the demands that arise in the daily life of the population to the discussion on how to win them, by the mobilization of the working class, in order to organize society according to other interests than those of the capitalists.

At the beginning of the morning session, a discussion also took place on the urgency of succeeding, all together, in overcoming the barrier of 500 sponsorships of elected representatives that the law imposes on us. This is the immediate task, the most urgent thing for everyone. At the conclusion of the national conference, a declaration was adopted, with 62 per cent of delegates voting in favour [2], in order to unite the organization around its campaign. Position B wished to make a public statement putting forward the basic disagreements and is calling for the constitution of a public current next October [3].

After this national conference, the challenge is now to put the internal discussions in the background, to unite the NPA and to turn the party outwards, towards struggles and towards the electoral campaign which must give coherence to our interventions, by linking them to our project of society.

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NOTES

[1] In May 2011, Olivier Besancenot best-known spokesperson of the NPA and presidential candidate in 2002 and 2007 for the LCR, decided not to be the candidate in 2012. His letter informing members of his decision was published in International Viewpoint [here](#).

[2] This declaration is published on ESSF: [Olivier Besancenot will not be NPA candidate in 2012](#).

Declaration of the National Conference of the NPA on the presidential election

The NPA (New Anti-Capitalist Party, France) held a National Conference on the 25th and 26th June to decide on its stance in the 2012 presidential elections. It adopted the following statement.

In Greece, in Spain and in the whole of the Arab world, millions of demonstrators are opposing the policies of the ruling classes and the states whose aim is to make the workers and the peoples of the region pay for the crisis. In France, the employers, Sarkozy and his government are engaged in violent and reactionary attacks against workers, women, young people and immigrants. Since it was founded, the NPA has consistently advocated the broadest unity in opposition to these attacks, and has initiated and taken part in all the unitary frameworks which make it possible to act effectively in this sense.

On the occasion of the upcoming elections, presidential and legislative, we want to continue these daily battles while making heard the voice of the exploited and oppressed, the working class, immigrants, women, youth, all the victims of the austerity imposed by a state that is subjected to the banks and the employers, and which uses racism and xenophobia to divide us. Starting from the positions discussed and adopted by our party since its foundation, we will defend a programme of breaking with capitalism, for a different distribution of wealth, so that wage-earners and the whole of the population do not pay for the crisis. It is a programme for struggles, for their generalization. It is the only way forward, faced with the social, political and ecological crisis which cannot be solved in the framework of a simple change of government, in a context of respect for state institutions and private property. A programme which could only be implemented by a workers' government, because only control and direct intervention by workers can overthrow the system and change the world.

In this context, the National Conference of the NPA presents the candidature of Philippe Poutou for the presidential election. He is a member of the NPA, a trade unionist who has for years been organizing the fight against the closure of his enterprise, against one of the world's leading car companies. He is an anti-capitalist, feminist, ecologist, anti-racist and internationalist candidate. [1]

In these campaigns, the NPA will make a voice heard which unambiguously condemns austerity policies, whether they are carried out by the Right or, as in Greece and Spain, by the Left. This voice will be completely independent of the Socialist Party and its allies. The NPA demands the cancellation of the debt, the expropriation of the banks, their socialization in a single public financial service under the control of the mobilised working class and the population and the defence and the improvement of the public services that are now being attacked under the pretext of the debt.

It wants to make a voice heard which, basing itself on their mobilizations, defends the interests of the workers against lay-offs, for a ban on sackings, for sharing out the work available and for pay rises (an increase of 300 euros a month, net, no wages below 1600 euros net, indexation of wages on prices) and for an end to intolerable working conditions.

A voice which, a few months after the catastrophe of Fukushima, demands an end to nuclear power and the expropriation of EDF, GDF-Suez, Areva, Total... and the creation of a public service making it possible to have energy planning.

A voice for equal rights, for the regularization of all undocumented workers, against all racist laws and discourses, in particular the stigmatization of Roms and Muslims. A voice which fights the National Front, a party that hides its support for all the capitalist attacks behind a pseudo-social discourse.

A voice which denounces and firmly combats the oppression of women and fights against all the forms of discrimination and violence that they undergo in both the public and private spheres. A voice which fights against the discriminations that lesbians, gays, Bi, transsexual and intersexual people experience.

A voice which refuses the unlimited power of the employers and the banks, which fights for real democracy, as the indignados at Puerta del Sol in Madrid, the Greek demonstrators of Syntagma Square and the revolutionaries of the Arab world demand. A voice which expresses its solidarity with all the struggles of the oppressed, starting with the struggle of the Palestinian people.

A voice to build another Europe, founded not on competition but on solidarity. A Europe of the workers and the peoples. A voice which is opposed to the military and economic interventions of French imperialism.

In the forthcoming electoral campaigns, we will make heard an emergency programme; we will defend a policy that is as faithful to the interests of the workers as the Right and the UMP, currently in government, are to the interests of the rich.

We have before us a difficult battle and we are faced with many obstacles. To start with, we must succeed, all together, in overcoming the barrier of 500 sponsorships of elected officials which the anti-democratic law imposes on us. Differences have been expressed during the preparation of the National Conference and in the conference itself. Our party must now unite around the fundamental demands which we share.

Our campaign will involve a collective leadership and campaign spokespersons, including our two national spokespersons and Olivier Besancenot. It will be based on the whole of the party. We call on all those who so wish to take their place in our collective combat.

Nanterre, June 26, 2011.

“The worker Poutou succeeds the postman Besancenot”

Philippe Poutou was designated the NPA candidate for the 2012 presidential election at the National Conference held on the 25th and 26th June. Putou is a worker from Ford's in Bordeaux. This article was published in the regional newspaper Sud-Ouest on Sunday 26th June.

Yesterday evening, the far-left party chose the trade unionist who works at Ford Blanquefort to represent it in 2012. Philippe Poutou was elected with 53 per cent of the votes.

“Calm and a hard worker”

A trade unionist, member of the CGT, this father of two children, who lives in Bordeaux, has been in all the battles to save jobs in his factory, which was due to close and which finally continues to operate. “He is a calm person, a hard worker, who thinks very quickly and thinks his ideas through to the end”, says Gilles Penel, one of his CGT colleagues at Ford. “We have seldom seen him lose heart during these difficult years”, testifies also Francis Wilsius, CFTC activist and representative on

the enterprise committee for several years.

“I will not try and be a super-Besancenot. I will be never as good as him. I will really need the help of my colleagues and friends to succeed”, the activist considers. Irony of history, he is the son of a postman, his three brothers and sisters are also postal workers. “As for me, I failed the entrance exam.”

Without any diploma, doing temporary work for ten years in small storage companies, before starting, again on a temporary contract, in the gear-box section of the Ford plant in 1996, Philippe Poutou came in contact with politics at a very young age.

He was born in Seine-Saint-Denis, but arrived in Gironde at the age of seven, and grew up in a family of Mitterrand supporters – something that he questioned as a teenager. He joined the far left when he was

18. For ten years, he was active in Lutte Ouvrière (LO). He read a lot. Marx and Engels, but also Zola, Hugo, Poullat, Jaurès. “It was the history of human society through novels that interested me the most”, he explains.

He left LO. After a disagreement with Arlette Laguiller, the local branch was expelled from the party. The Bordeaux members then formed “The Workers’ Voice”, before joining the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR) in 2000. Within the NPA, some people reproach Philippe Poutou with this too “workerist” approach. “We don’t all have the same way of seeing things. Personalization around the candidate doesn’t go down well in the party. In any case we will run the campaign in a collective way”, he replies.

Philippe Poutou is articulate. And also self-assured. Having got used to dealing with the media in the battle for Ford, he is also used to election campaigns. He has stood several times under the banner of the LCR then the NPA, in municipal legislative and European elections. In March 2010, heading the list for the regional elections in Aquitaine, he got 2.52 per cent of the votes.

Laurie Bosdecher for Sud-Ouest

Declaration of the Executive Committee members of the NPA supporting Position B

Anticapitalist, feminist and unitary, for an ecosocialism of the 21st century

At the National Conference of the NPA called to decide on the NPA’s stance in the 2012 presidential and legislative elections, the supporters of the minority position (known as Position B) made the following statement in the closing of the conference. The statement adopted by the conference can be found here and an article reporting on the conference here.

1. In line with the positions of a new majority leadership, the National Conference of the NPA has turned its back on the project of bringing together anticapitalists and on any kind of unitary perspective. By doing this, it has gone beyond simply taking a position on the presidential election. It considers that the NPA on its own is capable of responding to the challenges of the period, of

contesting, on the basis of an orientation of a break with capitalism, the hegemony of the Socialist Party and of social-liberalism.

The leaders of Position A explain in *Tout est a nous* that “the idea of regrouping antiliberals and anticapitalists on the electoral terrain and outside it, on the sole basis of non-participation in a government with the SP” is an “obscuring of our project” and that “the central axis of the NPA” must be “the direct dialogue with workers, young people, the unemployed”. Never in the short history of the NPA has a majority leadership defended such a strategy: reduced to self-assertion and self-centred construction, breaking with the project of a broad party launched by the LCR. Quite an achievement for a party which wanted to be much broader!

2. This proclaimed and programmed isolation can lead only to a dead end and will deprive the NPA of any ability to influence the debates which will arise from the important developments to come. In a political situation that is rich with potentialities but also full of threats, such a retreat is profoundly worrying. The crisis of capitalism, with its consequences of debt and austerity in Europe, the climatic and environmental threats and the latent food crisis that they involve, the scarcity of resources and the risks of war that they carry, the brutality of the policies followed by the Right and by social democracy, the uprisings and resistances which they provoke, from Greece to Spain, from France to Italy, the rise of the far Right, the Arab spring and the slow and inexorable catastrophe of Fukushima; the situation is new, moving and contradictory. In this context, it is necessary for us to be even more an open party, able to take initiatives, to intervene in an overall way without dissociating the social and ecological needs from politics, the street and the ballot box and thus to carry forward a project of anticapitalist unity independent of the SP, addressing the organizers of the social movement, without circumventing the political forces and currents.

We want the Right and the National Front to be beaten in 2012. It will then be a question of bringing together, in a block of left opposition, the social, ecologist and political forces that will refuse to participate in or support the policies followed by the social liberals. This is a decisive challenge which should be prepared as of now with determination by those who know that such unity is an absolute necessity in order to build an alternative. It is the object of a permanent political battle whose programme consists of a plan for an anticapitalist and ecosocialist break with capitalism, starting from the document adopted at our last Congress: “Our answers to the crisis”.

3. Concerning the possibilities of an electoral agreement with other forces for the 2012 presidential election, we continue to affirm that a single candidature of the forces to the left of the SP was desirable. But for us, any electoral agreement supposes that all the components clearly affirm the impossibility of governing with the SP and of constituting a parliamentary majority with it. We are obliged to recognise that with the Left Front these conditions do not exist.

We think that an active policy on the part of the NPA could have influenced the situation in a positive sense.

We also note that there exist many currents and activists who agree with us, who do not resign themselves to the division which reigns on the left of the Left and who refuse the perspective of a governmental agreement with social-liberalism.

So, as opposed to a counter-productive policy of denunciation and self-assertion, it is necessary to continue political confrontation, to influence the reconstruction and recomposition of the social and political movement (in particular social struggles and the legislative elections).

4. Although we recognize the result of the vote by the members of the NPA, we cannot take responsibility for the consequences of the decisions of this national conference: they express an

identity-centred posture of an NPA that no longer has any link with its founding project, which aimed to “represent what is best in the heritage of the socialist, communist, libertarian and revolutionary traditions. ” and to bring together the many who “in and around the parties of the institutional Left, have not given up the aim of radically changing society”.

This project was not to build a party by bringing together “the anonymous” around a core of “genuine anticapitalists”, addressing the masses directly, in an “anti-system” logic. “A party is not an end in itself. It is a tool to bring people together, to gain in effectiveness in the collective struggles” as our founding principles affirmed.

And “to bring together the anticapitalists” involves building initiatives on all terrains in order to create a political alternative which can polarize as broadly as possible anticapitalists of different horizons, traditions, experiences and generations.

The choices that have been made on the programme, the profile of the NPA and the method of designating the candidate are clearly those of a campaign of self-assertion and not of a campaign of uniting anticapitalists. During the national conference almost all the delegates of Position A voted against an amendment which proposed to add to their document a reference to “Our answers to the crisis”, a programmatic document adopted by a majority at the last congress. They also excluded the idea that the NPA should be represented at the presidential election by one of its spokespersons. That will certainly bring reproaches to a feminist organization which finally had the chance to present a woman as candidate. We cannot identify with the launching of this electoral campaign, which does not unite our party. We will continue to play our full role in the party while defending other choices.

5. After this national conference, at which an opposition emerged representing 40 per cent of the membership and of the delegates, we invite the comrades who agree with this orientation for the NPA to organize themselves in an anticapitalist, ecosocialist, feminist and unitary current. We are determined to continue to do everything possible along with all the members of the NPA. And we will also take the necessary measures to maintain the founding project of our party, on which a majority has unfortunately just turned its back. We will organize an assembly to establish this current in October. In the meantime we will discuss how it should function in a collective and democratic way, what means of expression we will have and the type of relations that we will maintain with other political, social and ecologist forces in France and in other countries.

Declaration by the members of the Executive Committee supporting Position B, after a collective discussion between the members of the National Political Committee and the delegates of Position B, who met together on June 26, 2011 during the National Conference of the NPA:

Catherine Faivre d’ Arcier, Coralie Wawrzyniak, Damien Joliton, Emre Cirak, Flavia Verri, Fred Borrás, Guillaume Liégard, Helene Adam, Ingrid Hayes, Leonce Aguirre, Marie-Do Bartoli, Monique Migneau, Myriam Martin, Olivier Mollaz, Pierre-François Grond.

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P.S.

* Translation: International Viewpoint.