

# France : Building a Movement to Oppose Hollande's Austerity and the Far Right

vendredi 28 février 2014, par [BATOU Jean](#), [SABADO François](#) (Date de rédaction antérieure : 22 février 2014).

**The following interview with François Sabado, a member of the national leadership of the French New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA), was conducted by Jean Batou for the Swiss publication Solidarités and published on the ESSF website.**

---

**Jean Batou : How you would characterize the social and political situation, nearly a year after the election of François Hollande, at a time when social movements are stalled while the far right is occupying the streets ?**

François Sabado : The current situation is deplorable. The background is the general European crisis, which has an effect on social movements. But while the current crisis could have stimulated anti-capitalist reactions, it has rather weakened the workers movement. There is resistance and even social explosions, but the political dimension of these struggles, the expansion of political protest, and the overall balance of forces remains weak. There are encouraging developments, but far less than the challenges of the period call for given the level of unemployment and the dismantling of public services and social security.

The social democrats have not made a Keynesian turn in response to the crisis. On the contrary, they have enthusiastically adapted to and embraced neoliberalism. A particularity of the situation in France is that over the last few decades the French bourgeoisie didn't put all of its eggs in one basket. It found alternating left/right rule useful. The SP has become the direct agent of Capital. It has no significant left wing current and all of its leadership is tied to the state apparatus and benefits from those ties. Yet the myth of the left-right opposition endures. In Italy this fiction has disappeared ; in Germany, the SPD governs with the right, which is not possible in France due to the structure of Fifth Republic state institutions.

**JB : Can you say more about the crisis in the Left Front (FdG) and the rise of the far right ?**

FS : The capitulation of the SP presents a problem for the CP : Hollande can no longer claim to represent change in a way that would build support for his government. But at the same time, municipal government continues to be a vital base of power for the CP which has 10,000 elected officials including 1,000-1,500 mayors and deputy mayors, which explains why it continues to present joint electoral campaigns with the SP, especially in Paris.

Mélenchon is a different story. He wants to rebuild the social democracy from which he comes. To do that, he has to destroy the PS. That explains his « radicalness. » Mélenchon sees himself and his notion of a fusion of the nation, the Republic, and state as representing a sort of European Bolivarianism. But while this is perhaps progressive in a developing Latin American country, it isn't

necessarily so in France, especially since he has supported imperialism and military intervention in Africa. But politically he supports building a left opposition to the government. Here our paths converge, but we do have programmatic and strategic differences. Today his project is in difficulty and people who believed in it are now having doubts.

While the disarray of the left is deepening as a result of its failure to present a left wing social and political alternative, the right and the far right are making gains. A social and political movement is developing around opposition to gay marriage, reminiscent of counter revolutionary, anti-Dreyfus, pro-colonial, pro-Vichy movements of the past, although these have not, however, been co-opted by the far right. At the same time, the far right is drawing on the tradition of the proto- fascist « leagues » of the interwar period. It's as if we're going back to the 1930s, even if this time the French bourgeoisie promotes capitalist globalization, although this could change.

**JB : Of course, it's a difficult period. But how can a robust left wing political force rooted in the social movements be built against the SP and the right ?**

FS : It must start from actual current struggles, like that in Brittany [which has recently witnessed impressive struggles against factory and hospital closings—translator's note] as our comrades there have understood so well. Although this remains a largely regional affair, our idea of building an independent worker movement to differentiate it from the bosses who participated in the movement was correct. When the struggles grow beyond the union movement or develop outside it, we supported them, even if its complicated and unclear. Politically, the goal is to work for unity among all those who oppose the government from the left. We did this for the municipal elections. The NPA was present on almost a hundred ballots, the majority of which were alliances with different parts of the FdG, Greens, anti-austerity groups, and the like.

Besancenot's idea of a weekend of left wing rebellion is also part of this. The idea is to build on people's anger and frustration as they see the right occupy the streets, to retake the initiative, and build a broad movement. On February 17, Mélenchon agreed to cosign an appeal with the NPA for a large national demonstration, probably on the weekend of April 12-13, which includes the CP even though he's really more interested in an electoral alliance with the European PdG and Alexis Tsípras of the Greek Syriza party. The action will be a response to the government austerity policies and the far right's recent days of rage. We're trying to bring together progressive sentiment on social issues with a broad, united political perspective independent of the paralyses of the FdG, the Party of the left, and the CP.

It's no secret that the NPA is in difficulty. But we're present in struggles and quite capable of taking political initiatives, particularly in the media, thanks to Besancenot. This also seems to be the case on the electoral plane since the polls give us 4% for the upcoming European elections versus 8-9% for the FdG.

---

**P.-S.**

\* Translation from the French is by K. Mann.