



The New Anticapitalist Party in France: a historic opportunity

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In one of the most exciting developments on the European left for many years, a radical new party has been founded in France. Dave Stockton looks at the great promise of the New Anticapitalist Party and argues for it to adopt a revolutionary communist programme.

The New Anticapitalist Party (Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste, NPA) held its founding congress on February 6-8 in La Plaine-Saint-Denis (Paris) with over 9,000 members represented by some 650 delegates. The NPA is already a force to be reckoned with, not only at the ballot box in the June elections to the European Parliament, but also in the struggles taking place now in the workplaces and on the streets.

The project of building the NPA was first announced after the 2007 presidential elections by Olivier Besancenot the candidate of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR), the French section of the Fourth International. In those elections Besancenot got a historically high score for the LCR of 1.5 million votes (4.1 %). During the year that followed, more than 400 local committees for a new party were formed across the country, recruiting substantial numbers of trade unionists, youth, members of ATTAC and supporters of José Bové. For many this was their first experience of political organisation.

Olivier Besancenot, 35 years old and a part-time postman, is undeniably a major factor in the NPA's success. He evokes sympathy among the youth and workers and has a 60 per cent approval rating in public opinion polls. But this is far from being the sole reason for the NPA's success. As Besancenot put it in his opening address to the NPA congress, 'we live in a new historical period, marked by mass resistance against capitalist attacks'. Everybody still remembers the banlieues uprising in November 2005; the mighty struggles against the CPE (a cheap, expendable special work contract for youth) in February-March 2006; and now we are in another period of upheaval in France.

On 29 January, 2.5 million workers struck - including private sector workers who have been on the margin of the great struggles of the last decade. Huge numbers marched in 200 towns and cities right across France. All the eight national trade union federations took part; CGT, CFDT, FO, FSU, UNSA, CFTC, CGC and SUD. The biggest general strike since the great one of 1995 has thrown France once again into a pre-revolutionary situation: the question of a decisive struggle against Sarkozy is posed again. Last summer Sarkozy had bragged 'in France now when there is a strike nobody will notice anymore.' The January strike changed Sarkozy's tune. Soon he was even trying to pose as the workers' friend. He announced a package of spending and tax cuts worth 2.6 billion euros but ruled out any further social spending, and rejected calls to reverse his earlier cap on the upper rate of income tax, which was a blatant handout to the rich.

Calls by the union leaders for substantive talks still went unheeded, so all the union federations called yet another day of action. On March 19, over 3 million workers struck and marched in more than 200 places with 350,000 marching in Paris alone. Moreover, the strikes are popular. An opinion poll (IFOP) published in the week of the strike showed that 78 per cent of French people believe it was justified. At the same time, the President's approval ratings are, at 36 per cent, at their lowest since he was elected nearly two years ago. Sarkozy, with his taste for the highlife and a personal circle of multi-millionaires, is also becoming gaffe prone. Outrage followed a statement by his closest friend, the

millionaire advertising tycoon Jacques Séguéla, that anyone who didn't own a Rolex watch by the age of 50 was 'a failure'.

Public sector workers reject the pro-market 'reforms' and privatisations planned by Sarkozy in the schools, the health service and the universities. Between the January and March general strikes there has been a wave of actions (work stoppages, occupations and blockades) by students, teachers and researchers at France's universities, protesting at the Péresse law that will slash teaching staff and open up education to market forces. Health workers have mobilised against the Bachelot law for the commodification and part privatisation of the health system.

For over a decade, the workers in the private sector have been largely absent from the mass mobilisations against various government attacks. To some extent they were cushioned by the relative economic stability of France at that time. Now, after a period of complacency in the autumn when the government claimed that France would escape the worst of the credit crunch, supposedly because it was less exposed to the sub-prime mortgage crisis, an economic blizzard has begun to hit France.

France in crisis

The eurozone's second-largest economy is now expected to contract by 1.5 per cent quarter-on-quarter between January and March, on top of the 1.2 per cent in the final three months of 2008, according to INSEE (National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies). Last year an extra 217,000 people joined France's jobseekers register, an 11.4 per cent rise over 2007. In January, French unemployment soared by 90,000 to around 2.2 million, the highest one-month rise since records began. This brought the total to more than eight per cent, and a further 330,000 jobs are likely to disappear between January and June. The European Commission predicts the official rate will hit 9.8 per cent by the end of this year and 10.6 per cent in 2010.

No wonder then that, at a time when Sarkozy is bailing out the banks to the tune of €360 billion, French workers, finding there is no bail out for them, are angry and fighting back. The slogan 'We won't pay for their crisis', first raised in Italy in the autumn, is now to be seen on all these mobilisations. Indeed, the movement has even raised the more militant slogan: 'They are the crisis; we are the solution.'

At a number of smaller workplaces faced with closures, workers have taken direct action. Serge Foucher, president of Sony France, was held hostage by angry workers facing a loss of 311 jobs in Pontonx-sur-l'Adour, in south west France. CGT union members forced him to negotiate. On 6 March, workers at the Goss International plant in Nantes occupied the plant for five days against relocation of production. At an ice-cream factory in Saint-Dizier, police stormed the plant, injuring fourteen workers, to free a manager from workers fighting job cuts.

In one part of France, the 'overseas department' of Guadeloupe, an even more militant struggle has been taking place. For 40 days, an island of 410,000 inhabitants, the largest of the French possessions in the Caribbean, was paralysed by a general strike, which spread to the neighbouring island of Martinique and inspired a similar movement in the Indian Ocean island of La Réunion. In Guadeloupe, the strike was led by the LKP (the Alliance against Exploitation), a grouping of 49 trade unions and other political and cultural associations. It seems to have won significant concessions from the French state and the bosses on the island and has proclaimed that it will not demobilise or dissolve itself but remain vigilant and press on for other demands.

On 19 February, in Paris, 30,000 demonstrators turned out to show their solidarity with the striking workers in Guadeloupe, whilst on 20 February, Olivier Besancenot joined a rally by workers outside the port authority in the island's capital of Pointe-a-Pitre, expressing his total support for the LKP against their employers and the French government. He also spoke to workers in Martinique. The NPA's leaflet carried the headline 'Guadeloupe shows the way forward'. Afterwards, Besancenot stated: '24 hour strikes and demonstrations will not be enough to make the government and the bosses give in. To stop the sackings, raise wages and lower prices, only a prolonged general strike will enable us to achieve our objectives.' He also called for an unlimited general strike and 'a new May '68'. The NPA has been joined in this call by the militant SUD trade union federation.

The larger federations like the CGT, on the other hand, are wedded to their old strategy of isolated one-day general strikes with a month or two between them. Their calculation is that this will put sufficient pressure on Sarkozy to negotiate with them whilst stopping workers' action from getting out of hand and challenging the very existence of the government. At the time of writing they want to wait till May Day for the next nationwide action, meanwhile promising some local or regional demonstrations.

It will require determined pressure from below to shift this delaying tactic. Here is where the NPA can make a real difference. Because of the NPA's calls for an all out, indefinite strike, some of the union leaders have started claiming the NPA is interfering in the trade unions, by trying to exploit or 'take over' their mobilisation. François Chérèque, leader of the CFDT complained about NPA members appearing outside factories threatened with closure, agitating for action to defend jobs.

Pierre-François Grond (NPA) observed with regret that the union leaders are:

'Living in the world of the Charter of Amiens. There should be no subordination of the unions to political parties but an absence of subordination does not mean that they should be a no-go area.'

The Charter of Amiens (1906), the syndicalist constitution of the original CGT, forbids interference by political parties in the trade unions. Olivier Besancenot told Chérèque more bluntly: 'you had better get used to it ' you're going to see a lot more of us'. That he is speaking so bluntly to the union officials is very encouraging and shows the potential of the NPA to break the hold of the reformist leadership in the workers' movement.

The combination of the unbroken power of the French unions, the spontaneous tendency to direct action shown by many French workers over the years, the tradition of huge waves of street demonstrations which can force governments to back down, and the formation of the NPA as a sizeable, radical and militant political force, means that in many respects France is the key to the international class struggle situation. In the words of Karl Marx in 1848, 'The crowing of the Gallic cock in Paris will once again wake up Europe'. The formation of the NPA adds a new and exciting component to this.

In the period ahead, there is a tremendous opening for revolutionary ideas and, indeed, revolutionary struggle, in France. The NPA could play a crucial role as the leadership of this struggle. The consequence of a major social explosion in the heart of imperialist Europe could resonate everywhere and boost anticapitalist resistance on a world scale. Let us look at how the new party is measuring up to the challenge.

New period, new programme, new party

A new period requires a new party and programme. This, in short, was the analysis the LCR leadership made when founding the NPA. They were right. It is a formula that applies in many countries in Europe and beyond. The waves of struggles, not just the workers' and youth movements but the anticapitalist and anti-war mobilisations throughout the decade, have created a new layer of activists who have identified capitalism itself as the enemy. The sudden slide into a deep economic crisis has confirmed them in their belief. The discrediting of neoliberalism and privatisation, along with the parties that promoted the free market mania, has contributed massively to the willingness of millions to consider radical and, indeed, revolutionary, solutions. The discredited parties are not only the right wing, conservative ones, but also all the major socialist parties and some communist parties, too.

Be it in the struggles of the workers, the movements of youth, the sans-papiers, or the international anticapitalist mobilisations, militant activists have learned their first lessons on the nature of the system and the state. None of the existing workers' parties, all in one way or another compromised with neoliberalism, were able to relate to them, let alone draw them into their ranks. On the other side, an increasing number of these activists have begun to experience the limits of spontaneity and amorphous libertarian movements and become convinced that they could go no further in creating 'another world' without a party. The NPA has started to organise and unite these fighters who come from widely different backgrounds.

In a recent article on the NPA, Daniel Bensaïd, Alain Krivine, Pierre Rousset, François Sabado, 'LCR veterans' as they

are described, put the NPA development in the context of major crises on the left in other countries; the emergence of the PSOL in Brazil in 2004-5, after the experience of the Lula PT rightwing government; the exit of Sinistra Critica in Italy, after the Rifondazione Comunista disaster with Bertinotti's participation in the Prodi government of 2006-08 and the subsequent electoral wipe out for RC; the explosion of Respect in England over George Galloway and the Scottish Socialist Party over Tommy Sheridan.¹ They point on the other hand to the successful maintenance of the longer standing Left Bloc in Portugal and the Red-Green Alliance in Denmark, although in the Danish general election of November 2007 the Red-Green Alliance lost two of its six seats. They emphasise the importance of 'the relationship with political power and participation or not in centre-Left and social-liberal governments' emphasising that these 'underlie our differences with the leadership of Die Linke in Germany, which has declared its support for parliamentary and governmental alliances with Social Democracy.'² However, in another interview, Bensaïd says 'in Germany I would probably be a member of Die Linke but in France we are not obliged to go through the Die Linke stage.'³

The programme of the NPA

The programmatic documents, they are not yet a completed programme, adopted by the NPA's founding congress clearly reflect and respond to the massive capitalist crisis through which we are passing and the militant mood of French workers and youth. They are certainly far to the left of the programmes of any similar left party initiatives we have seen in Europe over the last years. They were not, however, passed without a struggle at the congress, as the NPA includes a rightist minority led by Christian Piquet.

An important part of the founding conference was the debate on the electoral strategy for the coming European parliamentary elections. Piquet argued that the NPA should seek a left front with PCF and Parti de Gauche (Left Party, a recent left split from the French Socialist Party, which consciously sees itself as copying the tactic of Die Linke in Germany, that is, creating a new reformist party). The majority, with 76 per cent of the votes, decided it should stand on an anticapitalist programme d'urgence ('Emergency Programme', translated in appendix) with a series of immediate and transitional demands addressing the crisis.

The principal conference document Founding Principles of the New Anticapitalist Party (also translated in appendix) begins with a powerful indictment of capitalism, pointing out that there is:

'No good capitalism, productive as opposed to financial, they have long been united, nor is there a good 'green capitalism'.⁴

It defines imperialist capitalism as a fusion of banking and finance with industrial capitalism and attacks its exploitation of the semi-colonial countries and its wars to seize and plunder their natural resources. It unequivocally sides with those countries or national independence movements that are resisting French imperialism, as well as the other major powers. This is a core foundation on which to build a revolutionary policy in the imperialist countries. The programme states:

Thus the anticapitalists of an imperialist country must before everything struggle against their national capitalists, their own imperialist state and their army. It in this sense that we support the expropriation by the workers and the people of the country concerned of the French companies who exploit the workers and the resources of the oppressed countries. And wherever the French army (or that of other imperialist countries) is present, we support the popular resistance and the military defeat of the imperialist armies.'⁵

Moreover, on the terrain of the NPA's overall political strategy, it explicitly rejects the idea of an electoral road to socialism and reformism:

'It is not possible to put the state and existing institutions at the service of political and social transformation. These agencies, totally dedicated to defending the interests of the bourgeoisie, must be overthrown in order to establish new institutions at the service and under the control of workers and the population.'⁶

Instead it insists that:

Class domination cannot be eliminated along the road of reforms. It will require a social revolution to destroy capitalism, (it) will require a formidable popular mobilisation of the people that can create new forms of power that will give an anticapitalist government the means to carry out its policy.⁷⁷

It raises the property question as one not simply of capitalist nationalisation, which, as we have seen time and again, only transfers ownership to the capitalist class as a whole via their state, and compensates the individual owners at the expense of working class and lower middle class taxpayers. It poses clearly the alternative; the expropriation of the decisive sectors of the capitalist class, when it says:

This programme insists on the social appropriation of the produce of labour by the expropriation without compensation of the major capitalist groups beginning with those of CAC 40 and essential sectors and services under the control of the wage earners and the population.⁷⁸

The CAC 40 are the companies with the top values quoted on the French stock exchange: like Alstom, Alcatel, BNP Paribas, Carrefour, Michelin, GDF-Suez, Peugeot-Citroen, Renault and Vivendi.

When it comes to the structure of the programme the NPA is to adopt, it rejects the idea of a limitation of immediate demands to those possible within capitalism, raising even in its Emergency Programme demands which challenge the laws of profit and private ownership and open the road to socialist measures. It states:

We fight for an emergency programme responding to immediate needs, which challenges capitalist ownership of the means of production, attacks capital and profits, increases wages, pensions, minimum incomes and meet the needs of the population.⁷⁹

This emergency programme, in fact, contains a considerable number of transitional demands, that is, ones which challenge the rights of capitalist property, establish workers' control over production and point to the need for a general takeover of the capitalist economy and the replacement of its state with one based on organs of workers' struggle.

It correctly claims:

This is not a minimum programme, one on the cheap, but a series of objectives for mobilisation, measures that challenge the system and prepare for the socialism we are seeking.¹⁰

And adds:

The party we are building is a party of struggle!¹¹

It raises a whole series of democratic and human rights demands, including the dismantling of all existing systems of video surveillance, the suppression of the Bac (anti-criminality brigades) and the forces of repression, (CRS, gendarmes mobiles). It has detailed demands meeting the needs of women, youth and immigrants.

Despite these excellent positions there are still areas for improvement and development. The political system of De Gaulle's Fifth Republic is a semi-bonapartist regime, where enormous powers are concentrated in the hands of the presidency, and other less democratic institutions like the Senate. The Fundamental Principles has only one short sentence on this:

We want to finish with the anti-democratic institutions of the Fifth Republic (recallability of those elected, proportional representation in the assemblies?)¹²

On the question of the trade unions, the NPA fights for:

A trade unionism whose dual purpose is the defence of immediate and everyday demands but also the struggle for a transformation of society as a whole independently of parties and the State!¹³

It goes on to advocate:

Democracy in trade unions and in the struggles, self-organisation. We champion sovereign general assemblies, the

creation of strike committees, coordinations for the democratic representation of workers in struggle with elected revocable representatives. This is necessary so that the strikers and those who struggle make the decisions, really controlling their movement and are not dependent on union leaderships. These experiences are essential for the oppressed to take control of their fate and one day direct society.¹⁴

Excellent as these proposals are in themselves, the NPA needs to take a clear stance against the trade union leaders constituting a privileged bureaucracy, exerting an undemocratic control over the unions. The problem of the divisions between the different federations in the workers' movement is not mentioned and no policy is outlined for trade union unity at a plant and national level. No explicit reference is made to the evil effects of the 'keep politics out of the unions' position represented by the Charter of Amiens.

A further weakness is the section in the programmatic documents dealing with the question of government. The best we get is the following:

'It is by the development and generalisation of the struggles, generalised and prolonged strikes, that we can stop the attacks and realise our demands. It is the balance of forces due to the mobilisations that can allow us to set in power a government that will impose radical measures breaking with the system and that will start a revolutionary transformation of society.'¹⁵

The only way to deal with the 'question of power' is to set it in the context of a strategy that goes from the all out defensive struggle that a general strike represents via the creation of mass democratic councils of action (coordinations) to the struggle for power, for a workers' government based on the organs of struggle. If this is what the programme means then we can agree. Of course, many interruptions and halts are possible along this road, given the conservative leadership of the unions and the size of the reformist parties, but a party which proclaims itself revolutionary and socialist, as the NPA does, needs to be unambiguous on where it seeks to take the working class. By not making an explicit statement of a revolutionary policy on the workers' government, the programme remains evasive on this central aspect of the programme. The NPA must clarify this position in the months ahead.

A sharp turn to the left by the LCR

The LCR's left turn began over two years ago, in the six months before the 2007 presidential elections. For most of the early years of this century, the LCR had identified neoliberalism, not capitalism, as the enemy and sought to create an anti-neoliberal party with intransigently reformist forces like Attac and the French Communist Party (PCF).

The lowest point of this rightward-moving policy was the panic which led them to call for a vote for incumbent right-wing president Jacques Chirac in 2003, 'holding one's nose', to keep out the fascist Jean Marie Le Pen. This abandonment of principle, i.e. never to vote for a capitalist party or candidate, showed a loss of faith in the capacity of the French working class to swiftly bring down the government in the unlikely event of a Le Pen victory. It was an incredibly rightist position that led to the LCR being totally disarmed in the face of the movement and showed how far the LCR was from a consistent revolutionary policy. In short, it indicated, once again, that the LCR and the Fourth International had long ago lost touch with the programme of the revolutionary Trotskyist tradition and become a centrist party.

Yet the defining characteristic of centrism, its repeated zig-zags between reformist and revolutionary policy, allows it not only to swing to the right onto the terrain of reformist practice, but also to swing to the left and adopt positions that are really very close to the revolutionary Trotskyist tradition. This is clearly what we have seen with the formation of the NPA, which has adopted a programme that is far better, far more revolutionary than anything developed by the European left since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the shift rightwards of social democracy, and the space this created for a breakthrough for the far left. As we have seen, the NPA programme puts forward a series of transitional demands, calls for the expropriation of the French capitalist class and makes a statement, albeit one that needs to be concretised and made more explicit, on the need for a workers' government based on organs of struggle from below.

While we absolutely welcome this left turn and encourage not only French workers to join the NPA but also similar

anticapitalist party project to be initiated elsewhere in Europe, we must not forget the LCR's past practice. Leaders of the LCR have made a self-criticism of their previous policy of pursuing a new reformist party with the PCF but they have done so only on empirical grounds - 'it was mistaken as it didn't work?' - rather than principled, methodological ones. The NPA needs to rediscover the method and principles of the classical revolutionary tradition, its approach to the united front, its tactics towards reformism, its understanding of revolutionary programme, and this will mean breaking with the centrism of the post-war Trotskyist tradition, including the opportunist method the LCR developed in this time. While the LCR leadership have swung to the left today they could easily swing rightwards again in the future unless these arguments about revolutionary method and programme are really had out inside the NPA.

?The party we are building is a party of struggle?

The members of the League for the Fifth International in France supported the creation of the NPA from the beginning as a big step forward in the French class struggle, in marked contrast to the weak electoral coalition of centrists and reformists, advocated by the LCR in the past, which would have fragmented at the first serious test. We argue that, with a transitional action programme, and with the correct tactics and slogans for the situation of intense class struggles that lie ahead, the NPA can indeed become a revolutionary party. But, to do this, further and more decisive steps forward are needed in the coming months and years.

The NPA points to the example of Guadeloupe, to the need for immediate and transitional demands to meet the needs of workers in the economic crisis. It is calling both on the union leaders and workers at the base to push for a general strike, organised by coordinations. This is absolutely correct but will lead the NPA into a political confrontation with the leaders of the large union federations like the CFDT and CGT who support the Socialist Party and the PCF.

The NPA needs to make its programme much more concrete in the period ahead. It should add to its call for an all out and indefinite general strike to smash Sarkozy's reforms and stop the wave of sackings, a call for every single workplace facing job cuts or closure to be occupied and then appeal for all out solidarity strikes from other sectors, both locally and nationally. If this road is taken France could easily see a repetition of the great wave of factory occupations and strikes that marked May and June of 1936 and 1968.

The NPA also needs to be much clearer than it has so far been on the main obstacle standing in the way of this: the trade union bureaucracy. The leaders of all the major federations, backed up by the SP and CP leaders, constituted a blockage to the victory of the mass struggles that have shaken France several times in the last ten years and are mounting once again. The militant workers face what Trotsky called a 'crisis of leadership?'. The NPA needs to explain this unambiguously and advance a solution to it in the form of revolutionary communist leadership.

This does not mean some sort of sectarian isolation, denouncing the workers' leaders from the sidelines. The NPA, and the militants it influences, need to act with the existing leaders when they take forward the struggle but without them if they do not. This means, at the same time, warning workers of the treacherous role played by the trade union bureaucracy in holding back the struggle and fighting, as the NPA programme pledges, for democratic rank and file control of the struggles. In this way - unlike in 1936 and 1968 - an alternative leadership to the reformist bureaucrats will begin to take shape. In mass strikes and occupations, if workers take control of them, a new leadership can take the lead with incredible rapidity.

There are many correct demands and policies already in the emergency programme of the NPA. Now, they need to be focused in a clear agitation for wage increases and job security, the banning of all sackings and the abolition of precarité and the abandonment of all the neoliberal reforms. Local and sectional struggles should be used to mobilise other sectors and to generalise the movement towards a mass strike movement (of general strike proportions) even if the trade union leadership blocks the call for a general strike.

Of course, for now, workers wish to force these concessions from Sarkozy rather than force him out of office. However, a mass strike wave, the formation of democratic coordinations to direct it, the formation of the workers' self-defence organisations that the NPA programme talks of, would semi-paralyse the state and would create two centres of power in society. It would induce a massive political crisis and the reformist leaders would be called in to help stabilise

the bosses' rule, either with Sarkozy or as an emergency replacement for him.

The NPA's programme talks about 'shifting the balance of forces' in favour of the workers but, in a revolutionary situation, such as would be created by an all out general strike, no lasting equilibrium can be expected. As Trotsky pointed out, every real general strike poses the question of power:

'The fundamental importance of the general strike, independent of the partial successes which it may, and then again may not, provide, lies in the fact that it poses the question of power in a revolutionary manner. By shutting down the factories, transport, generally all the means of communication, power stations etc., the proletariat by this very act paralyses not only production but also the government. The state power remains suspended in mid-air. It must either subjugate the proletariat by famine and force and constrain it to set the apparatus of the bourgeois state once again in motion, or retreat before the proletariat.

Whatever may be the slogans and motive for which the general strike is initiated, if it includes the genuine masses, and if these masses are quite resolved to struggle, the general strike inevitably poses before all the classes in the nation: Who will be the master of the house?

The leaders of the proletariat must understand this internal logic of the general strike, unless they are not leaders but dilettantes and adventurers. Politically, this implies that from now on the leaders will continue to pose before the proletariat the task of the revolutionary conquest of power. If not, they must not venture to speak of the general strike.'¹⁶

The NPA should make it clear in its action programme that its goal, not just in the distant future, but in this struggle against the crisis and Sarkozy, is to bring down the neoliberal president and his entire capitalist regime and replace it with a workers' and small farmers' government, based on the newly created democratic organs of struggle, coordinations, assemblies and workers' defence organisations. The bourgeoisie is never more dangerous than when it is terrified that it could lose everything. Thus, the statement in the Founding Principles about the justification of workers' self-defence must be turned into concrete proposals for such organisations in every workplace, school and university.

The NPA needs to take concrete actions along these lines. If it does so, if it develops a frank and courageous stance towards the union leaders and avoids a zig-zag back in the direction of the reformists in the elections, it can seriously begin to wrestle leadership of the French working class movement from the agents of the capitalist class and open a struggle for working class power.

This revolutionary policy will mean a struggle within the NPA against its rightwing minority around Christian Piquet. A decisive test in the class struggle, when the question of reform or revolution is sharply posed, will mean a break with his minority. The left majority of the NPA, meanwhile, must find clarity on the revolutionary programme and strategy through the course of the struggles ahead and beware of an attempt by the ex-LCR leaders to vacillate back towards the politics of reformist concession and compromise. Plainly, the situation in France is of huge importance to the international working class. Already it is in a pre-revolutionary situation, further titanic struggles could deepen the crisis and create a fully revolutionary situation where the question of power, of workers' revolution is posed. The NPA must have a perspective of leading the workers' revolution: it must become a revolutionary party.

If it does so, then everything is possible.

Appendix 1

Founding Principles of the New Anticapitalist Party, 7 Feb 2009

We participate in elections to defend our ideas, to gather people on a broad scale around our programme. (?)

In the municipality and in parliament, we will support all measures that improve the situation of workers, democratic rights and respect for the environment. We will contribute to the task of implementing them if the voters charge us with this responsibility. But we will remain faithful to the goals we are fighting for and will not participate in any coalition

which contradicts this struggle.

Our elected representatives are unwilling to co-manage the system. They will be tenaciously opposed to anti-social measures and will defend tooth and nail the interests of workers and the public, independently of rightist or social-liberal majorities.

At the national level, implementation of such a programme involves confrontation with the dominant classes and will require a formidable popular mobilisation of the people that can create new forms of power that will give an anticapitalist government the means to carry out its policy. Class domination cannot be eliminated along the road of reforms. Such struggles can enable us to restrict it, to tear from it progressive measures for the popular classes, but not to abolish it. In 1789, the dominance of the privileged class of the Ancien Regime was not abolished by reforms. It took a revolution to eliminate it. It will require a social revolution to destroy capitalism. It thus necessarily implies a change in the relations of ownership, social and institutional, which affects all aspects of society.

Our choice of means to achieve this is based exclusively on the expression and mobilisation of the majority. At the same time we clearly announce in advance that we will seek to organise self-defence workers, so that a military coup and the massive repression that took place in Chile in 1973 cannot be repeated.

?The emancipation of the workers will be the work of the workers themselves? (Marx, Communist Manifesto) remains our compass. More generally, it is the forces of reaction that impose violence. We choose, by the number and the forms of struggle that make claims legitimate and popular, to go unhesitatingly beyond the narrow framework of legality to obtain satisfaction, to making picket lines effective, to requisition vacant property for the homeless, to hide sans papiers hunted by the authorities, to disobey faced with the intolerable ?

The aim of our party is not to take and power for itself. We fight now and everywhere for self-organisation of struggles to prepare for the overthrow of capitalist society and self-rule by the workers and popular masses.?

Appendix 2

The NPA's emergency plan for the workers' struggle

? Prohibition of sackings on pain of takeover by the state and the sharing of work amongst all with no loss of pay: continuation of production under workers' control. For firms genuinely in difficulties, finance should be provided through the intermediary of a public banking service, based on a special levy on all shareholders.

? A rise in wages, pensions, the minimum wage and welfare entitlements. An increase of 300 euros net per month for all; no income, wage or other main means of support below 1,500 euros net; an indexing of wages to price rises

? Abolition of VAT on all products which meet basic needs; freezing or reduction of rents,

? A halt to all evictions and to gas and electricity disconnections. Requisition of empty dwellings

? Development of the public services and an immediate halt to the privatisation of the Post Office and Health

? free credit for self-employed workers, cancellation of the debts for small traders, artisans and farmers in need.

? A massive and progressive reduction of working time to 35 hours weekly and then to 32 hours.

? Cancel the debts of employees and unemployed, the first victims of over indebtedness.

? Guarantee of deposits and savings accounts of ordinary people

? Requisition of profits and dividends to shareholders

? Cancellation of the State Debt

? Nationalisation without compensation of repurchase of all banks, expropriation of their shareholders, unification into a single public service bank (if possible in Europe) under the control of workers and people who will be able to guide investment towards the needs of the population.

? To ensure that this control is exercised, it is essential to open the account books of the large private enterprises as well as those of the State, to abolish banking secrecy. This must also include the prohibition of tax havens.

Beyond these emergency measures, it is time to put end to a system which leaves the principal means of production and exchange in the hands of the bourgeoisie. This necessarily implies an incursion into capitalist property, calling into question the employers' absolute rights over the economy and, quite simply, private ownership of large-scale means of production.

In its place this means that we must advance as our objective the logic of social need substituting it for the logic of profit. It is necessary to advance towards the social ownership of sectors of the economy. It is a question of making a living and legitimate reality of the socialist and revolutionary perspective.

Appendix 3

Interview with Olivier Besancenot, from Tribune de Geneve, 6 February 2009

The NPA will participate in the European elections in June. Have you abandoned the revolutionary option?

Not at all! We have not abandoned the revolutionary option. It remains valid. We want to create another society, not to redecorate capitalism.

Whoever talks of revolution necessarily means violence. Do you assume this?

You need to know what violence you are talking about. Capitalism is violent when it seeks to break up the institutions the people have created. I envisage violence only as the self-defence of the people.

Why participate in elections if you hold to the revolutionary option?

This is a moment where we can mobilise, and when elected, defend the public services, demand the building of social housing, the creation of nurseries. We do not neglect elections but we don't make them our sole means of action and struggle, far from it.

What are the relations of the NPA with the Socialist Party ?

An alliance with the PS would be against nature. The Socialists accept a society based on the market, which we want to get away from.

And with other parties of the extreme left?

Our approach is for unity with them but not one limited to elections. An agreement must cover all forms of struggle. In addition, an electoral alliance should be valid for all elections and not for one occasion.

If you come to power. What would you do?

We will establish a truly democratic society which, unlike the one we face today, is organised from the bottom up to the top, very decentralised. Elected district committees dealing with their sphere. From that subjects should be addressed at another level, they are managed by regional committees, national, then ? why not? ? international. At all levels the basis is to decide democratically.

Your scheme seems more anarchist than Trotskyist!

The NPA is not only Trotskyist. It incorporates all revolutionary traditions, Marxist but also libertarian.

All documents in appendix translated from French by Dave Stockton

ENDNOTES

1 ?From the LCR to the NPA?, International Viewpoint, January 2009, available online at <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article1585> [1]

2 ibid

3 Video on Daily Motion, available at http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x7ubj0_daniel-bensayd-et-dielinke_news [2]

4 ?Founding Principles of the New Anticapitalist Party?, 7 February 2009, passed by the founding conference of the NPA. Translated by Dave Stockton for Fifth International (see appendix), originals can be read in French at www.europe-solidaire.org [3]

5 ibid

6 ibid

7 ibid

8 ibid

9 ibid

10 ?General Resolution on the Political and Social Situation?, 7 February 2009, the founding conference of the NPA. Included within this is the ?Emergency Programme? of the NPA for the current crisis. The document can be read in French on www.europe-solidaire.org [3]

11 ibid

12 op cit, ?The Founding Principles of the New Anticapitalist Party?

13 op cit, ?General Resolution on the Political and Social Situation?

14 ibid

15 op cit, ?Founding Principles of the New Anticapitalist Party?

16 Trotsky, L., Once Again Whither France, March 28 1935

Source URL: <http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/new-anticapitalist-party-france-historic-opportunity>

Links:

[1] <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article1585>

[2] http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x7ubj0_daniel-bensayd-et-dielinke_news

[3] <http://www.europe-solidaire.org>