

France: A conversation with the NPA's Alain Krivine

By Alex Lantier
12 February 2009

World Socialist Web Site reporters interviewed Alain Krivine at the founding congress of the New Anti-Capitalist Party (Nouveau Parti Anti-Capitaliste—NPA). The replies given by Krivine—the historical leader of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR)—clarify the political significance of the LCR's decision to dissolve itself into the NPA and repudiate any association with Trotskyism.

After first expressing his satisfaction at the NPA congress proceedings thus far, Krivine answered WSWs reporters' questions on his appraisal of the economic crisis, taking an equivocal position: "Well I'm not an economist," he said. "I think that no one can say how long it will last and what damage it will cause, but it will be considerable damage."

Asked what political consequences he foresaw from the economic crisis, he responded: "When you have a situation of distress in peoples' lives, there are two possible responses: either people resist, fight back, it's an explosion, or they turn in on themselves, no longer believe in struggle, and one has an individualistic skedaddle. Either can occur, so I am prudent."

After citing as an encouraging sign the 2.5 million strikers who took part in the January 29 day of action organized by France's trade unions, he added, "So I said there's a potentially explosive situation, will it explode...?" He shrugged.

Asked about the election of Obama, Krivine said, "Obama, we have no illusions; he has the support of the big bankers, he's pro-capitalist." However, he quickly added, "We're not neutral either. It's true that electing a black person, with everything that means in the US, it's a considerable step forward."

In more detailed comments, Krivine contradicted his claim to have no illusions about Obama. "The positive aspect, in the US, is that it changes everything," he said. "He has remobilized the American people, and that's a positive aspect; people are going into the streets to help him... There will be reforms better than those of Bush. It can't be worse than Bush, so maybe a word on unemployment, taking a bit of money from the bosses."

Asked what he foresaw for US-Europe relations in an international political situation dominated by wars and foreign interventions, Krivine responded, "Europe now, it's a joke, it's the Americans that dominate; so for Europe as it is, with nuances, it won't change so long as Europe is capitalist." He added, "With Obama, Europe will get along somewhat better,

he will be a little bit less off-putting than Bush."

Asked what perspective the NPA would bring to workers' struggles, he said the NPA's goal is "to help in the struggle—we're not trade unionists, we try to bring politics in, but we try to bring about a coordination of struggles, so it's not everyone in his own corner." Undeterred by the trade unions' public hostility to such a perspective in every major strike movement in recent years, he continued: "The overall idea is to arrive together at the general strike, it's clear."

With carefully parsed and elliptical phrases, Krivine outlined a perspective of not calling for revolutionary struggle but, if such a situation arose, to use it to form a coalition government with established parties of the French bourgeois left—the Socialist Party (PS) and the French Communist Party (PCF) in particular. He said that the NPA would work so that "if tomorrow there is a general strike—that does not depend on us—like in 1968, it will end up better, that is, so that it really poses the question of power."

Asked how the NPA would try to act differently from 1968, Krivine said, "[In 1968] people would have had to learn to elect strike committees, to elect delegates and make them go to Paris, that is to say, creating a form of power that is not legal but legitimate, a legitimate counter-power that might have been a candidate for power."

Krivine was, however, hostile to workers' power and insisted on the role of coalitions of existing parties of the French political establishment: "There were demonstrations at the end of 1968 where hundreds of thousands of people were calling for workers' power. It didn't mean anything. To whom, for what purpose, to give power? And the political parties of the time did not want it—it was the PCF. The PS was AWOL. We were very young, students, so there was no one that was a candidate for power."

Asked if the NPA today would try to take power, Krivine responded: "Not necessarily, no, but I would say that I hope first there would be, for example, a national association of strikers, a strike movement in which political parties like ourselves could play a role...."

The main orientation of the NPA is toward the construction of a new "left" coalition. When WSWs reporters asked with what other parties the NPA might build such a coalition,

Krivine responded: "I don't know, I don't know what state the PCF will be in, currently it's in crisis. There might be more significant splits in the PS than that of Mélenchon [who recently founded the Left Party and is calling for an electoral accord with the NPA]. There are other groups of the 'far left' which have not joined the NPA—Lutte Ouvrière, the Alternatifs. There are not a lot but some small groups that are coming to the NPA, for their reasons, but that are not negligible either."

Krivine's goal, in the context of a revolutionary upsurge of the working class against French capitalism, is thus to work with the parties of the French establishment left to share state power.

Such a perspective is completely incompatible with Trotskyism, that is, revolutionary Marxism. Alliances involving the PS and the PCF, two practiced defenders of French capitalism, have presided over a return to work and sell-out of two extremely promising revolutionary situations: the general strikes of 1936 under the Popular Front government comprising the Socialist Party and the bourgeois Radical Party, and 1968 general strike that erupted against the government of General Charles de Gaulle.

Writing after the sell-out of the 1936 general strike, Trotsky insisted that revolutionary struggles could triumph in France only based on a complete political and organizational break with these parties: "What can save the situation in France is the creation of a genuine revolutionary vanguard of several thousand men, clearly understanding the situation, completely free from the influence of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois public opinion ('socialist,' 'communist,' 'anarcho-syndicalist,' etc.) and ready to go to the end. Such a vanguard will know how to find the road to the masses."

Instead, Krivine proposes to build alliances with these parties. Not coincidentally, despite occasional favorable references, Krivine views Trotskyism and the history of the Fourth International, which Trotsky founded, with hostility and contempt. Asked what Trotsky's legacy means today, Krivine responded: "The positive aspect of Trotsky, who had his share of fuck-ups, was that he organized the struggle against Stalinism."

Such a position hides a massive contradiction: Krivine claims his interest in Trotskyism derives from the struggle against Stalinism, yet he is now considering as a possible coalition partner the Stalinist PCF.

Asked what he thought Trotsky's errors were, Krivine replied: "I think he was wrong about Stalinism. He wrote that after Stalinism, a democratic socialism would appear. [But] what came back was horrible—a wild capitalism with Putin and everything. So this diagnosis, he had indeed foreseen that it would get into trouble, Stalinism, but he was wrong about what would follow."

Here Krivine is simply falsifying the position of Trotsky, who expressed his judgment on the future of the USSR perhaps most famously in *The Revolution Betrayed*: "a further

development of the accumulating contradictions can as well lead to socialism as back to capitalism; on the road to capitalism the counterrevolution would have to break the resistance of the workers; on the road to socialism the workers would have to overthrow the bureaucracy. In the last analysis, the question will be decided by a struggle of living social forces, both on the national and the world arena."

The meaning of Krivine's falsification is to place responsibility for the betrayal of socialist revolution inside the USSR not where it belongs—the Soviet bureaucracy and its international accomplices such as the PCF, to whom Krivine now orients the NPA—but upon the course of events, whose outcome Krivine treats as essentially inevitable.

WSWS reporters asked Krivine for his opinion of the 1953 split in the Fourth International, in which the International Committee of the Fourth International emerged from the elements hostile to an orientation to the Stalinist parties, while the political forebears of the LCR supported a tactic of carrying out political work inside the Stalinist parties and trying to influence their political line. Krivine replied, "I think this debate has been made completely irrelevant by events."

If something positive is to come out of the NPA congress, it will be precisely to clarify the significance of the positions taken by Krivine, the LCR and the NPA on the political heritage of Trotsky. Krivine's views on the legacy of Trotsky and the history of the Fourth International are bound up with a definite political orientation: the open rejection of socialism and the formation of a catch-all "anti-capitalist party" of the petty-bourgeois left, laying the basis for participation in bourgeois coalition governments.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>