

French pseudo-left works to defeat workers' opposition to upcoming pension cuts

By Anthony Torres
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On June 16, the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF), supported by the Left Party (PG) of the former Socialist Party (PS) minister Jean-Luc Mélenchon—the main parties of the Left Front (FdG)—organised in Paris the “Conference for a change of course in France and Europe.”

The project under discussion was to see how to change the policies of the present PS parliamentary majority and to convince President François Hollande of the PS to invite the FdG into his government in order to modify his austerity policies. The aim was thus to promote illusions that the pro-austerity government could be pressured to adopt pro-worker policies.

These long-time allies of the PS would be terrified by any struggle in which workers and youth revolted and sought to overthrow this government, which is at the command of the bankers served by the European Union (EU).

When the government was in deep crisis—after the revelations that the Budget Minister Jérôme Cahuzac, responsible for cutting the budget and social gains, was evading his taxes—Mélenchon spoke of “taking a broom” to the government to reform it. He immediately proposed that Hollande should appoint him prime minister to put an end to the crisis.

The NPA, which tries to act as a last line of defense for the bourgeois Republic, was troubled by this open rallying to Hollande of a political force which it always refers to as opposed to austerity and part of the “nongovernment left.” The NPA feared that Mélenchon’s desire to serve under Hollande might expose the anti-working class character of the entire pseudo-left, including the NPA.

Mélenchon organised the May 5 demonstration, not “to take a broom” to the government, but to divert any spontaneous movement against the government, at a

record low in the opinion polls at 25 percent, towards the idea that it could be pushed to the left. This gave the protest a fundamentally pro-government character.

Despite its toothless criticisms of Mélenchon, the NPA participated in the May 5 demonstration. So, in fact, while the FdG was offering its services to prop up Hollande, the NPA was trying to bring the working-class opposition behind the FdG.

The NPA’s letter addressed to the conference criticises the FdG for seeking to “bring together the forces which participate in the government majority with the forces which are in the opposition...without clearly coming down on either side.”

It continues, “It is not possible to fight the policies of austerity, the drive for competitiveness, the dismantling of the labour code without declaring oneself to be the opposition to the government.” Criticising the call of the FdG for “a change of course,” the NPA proposes a “change of policies” based on a “relationship of forces on the ground.”

These criticisms are a fraud, aiming to trap working-class opposition behind bankrupt, pseudo-left parties. There is no meaningful difference between the NPA’s proposal of a “change of policies” and the FdG’s call for a “change of course.” Both of these would be policy shifts proposed by organisations closely tied to the PS, after street protests controlled by them.

The political fraud the NPA is perpetrating is particularly clear from its lenient attitude to the PS. Instead of characterising the PS government as what it is, a direct and conscious agent of the banks, the letter makes out that the government is unconscious: “Far from drawing the lessons from its failures,” it “blindly carries on with the same policies.”

Finally the NPA makes its usual call: “We want,

together, to initiate in a wide democratic debate between political and trade union organisations, social organisations, between all the organisations of the social movement, to create a dynamic capable of reversing the course of events.”

On June 14, Yannick Moreau, the chair of the Pensions Commission, delivered her report commissioned by the PS government, which recommends an extension of the 2010 reform of former conservative President Nicolas Sarkozy. It prepared the basis for the Social Conference on June 20 and 21, where it was debated by the trade unions, the employers and the government.

The report begins by asserting that in 2020 that it will be necessary to eliminate the combined deficit of all the pension schemes, estimated at 20 billion euros, proposing a total of €7 billion in short-term savings. The suggestions for the reforms which the government, the employers and the trade unions will have to decide on are: an increase in the contribution period from 41.5 years to 43 years for the generation born in 1962, then to 44 years for people born in 1966; higher taxes for pensioners; higher social security contributions; a reform of the way of calculating government workers' pensions, no longer on the last six months' salary but on the last ten years.

A *Le Monde* article reports the words of a confidante of Hollande's as to a possible social explosion: “It's a minority position in the majority, but I'm sure that a large mass movement can be avoided.”

Le Monde explains this optimism further on: “Until now, none of [the government's] reforms liable to upset the most left part of its electorate has stirred up as much opposition as the Cassandras had predicted.”

Le Monde continues: “The government's confidence derives from its method, as Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault explains, of ‘consultation.’” That is to say, the PS government, like Sarkozy's, is relying on the unions supported by the NPA and the FdG to attack the working class once again.

The bourgeoisie fears, however, that the unions may be overwhelmed by the working class with a movement that would develop into a struggle against the government, as nearly happened with the oil strike against the 2010 pension reform under Sarkozy.

The Sarkozy government sent out the CRS riot police, which forced open the refineries and oil depots

at the moment when the government was on the ropes, relying on the trade union bureaucracy, which had abandoned the picketing strikers under attack from the police. The pseudo-left, subservient to the trade union bureaucracy, did not denounce this betrayal by the unions.

The political perspectives of the NPA and the Left Front are not fundamentally opposed, despite the NPA's criticisms of Mélenchon. Both organisations seek an understanding whereby the working class will suffer a defeat at the hands of the government, while concealing as much as possible their treacherous role against the workers.

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