

Fillon presidential bid in France exposes bankruptcy of NPA backing of Hollande

By Alice Laurençon
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The shift to the right reflected in the rise of François Fillon as The Republicans' (LR) presidential candidate emerges from disillusionment with the reactionary presidency of François Hollande, which was supported by the various political satellites of Hollande's Socialist Party (PS).

Now, the New Anticapitalist Party (NPA) is blaming Fillon's emergence as a violently right-wing candidate calling for war and deep austerity, not on the record of the PS, but on the electorate. It writes, "His electors saw in Fillon a coherent politician, who was the most able to put in place the ultra-free-market economic policy and very conservative lifestyle policy they wanted."

Lutte Ouvrière (LO, Workers Struggle) also lamented that the right-wing electors who selected Fillon in the LR presidential primary "chose the person with the most reactionary program, including well-meaning Catholicism on social issues."

Such demoralized comments only serve to legitimate the reactionary proposals of Fillon, by falsely portraying them as reflecting a layer of public opinion. The millions of voters who chose Fillon in the LR primaries did not do so because they aspire to destroy Social Security and health care coverage, or want to see the consequences of a major escalation of war in the Middle East. In fact, Fillon carried the primary even though he is presenting a program without a shred of popular support or democratic legitimacy.

Apparently, an important factor in the surprise victory of Fillon in the first round of the LR primaries was the attempt by voters to prevent Sarkozy—who was discredited by his austerity measures and wars as president between 2007 and 2012—from again taking office. About 40 percent of Fillon electors chose him to stop Sarkozy, as well as 70 percent of Juppé voters.

Responsibility for the rise of Fillon and the far right lies above all with organizations like the NPA and LO, who blocked opposition to the PS from its left, in the working class. By unambiguously indicating their support for Hollande in 2012, and by working with the union bureaucracy to strangle deep working class anger with Hollande's policies in office, they enormously contributed to the rise of Fillon and the neo-fascist National Front.

It is only the absence of an alternative on the left visible to masses of workers—under conditions where the discrediting of the PS also discredits the NPA and LO—that give Fillon and the FN the appearance of strength. It seems safe to predict that many voters who chose Hollande in 2012 will vote differently in 2017, for the right or the far right.

The PS and its satellites, including the NPA and LO, also legitimized Fillon and the far right with their own right-wing policies. The PS imposed the state of emergency, tried to inscribe deprivation of nationality in the constitution, dismantled the Calais refugee camp and accepted local bans on burkinis. After the Paris attacks on November 13, 2015, Hollande invited Marine Le Pen to the Elysée palace, supposedly to build "national unity."

Jean-Luc Mélenchon—the presidential candidate of the Left Front, all of whose deputies voted the state of emergency at the National Assembly in November 2015—backs banning the burkini in the name of fighting for gender parity: "All religions create problems at the level of male-female equality. In the case of Islam, it is perhaps the most visible."

The NPA and LO also participated in such moves to normalize the FN, most obviously on lifestyle issues that are important to these organizations' middle class constituencies.

Threats to ban the burkini are the product of over a decade of attacks on Muslims' democratic rights and religious freedom, starting with the banning of the veil in public schools under right-wing President Jacques Chirac in 2004. The NPA and especially LO backed the ban enthusiastically, claiming it would defend secularism and women's rights.

The NPA also denounced any left-wing criticism of the imperialist wars launched by Washington and the European imperialist powers in Syria, provocatively dismissing such criticism as aid to the Islamic State (IS) militia. The NPA complained that left-wing organizations hostile to the Syria war "have stressed the very real political and historical responsibility of imperialism so much that the denunciation of the Islamic State became inaudible."

Thus, the NPA was demanding that anti-war sentiment be muzzled so that anti-IS propaganda, which was at the heart of the media campaign for the state of emergency in France and the war in Syria, be allowed to continue unimpeded.

In the reactions of the NPA and LO to the LR primary and Fillon's victory, what is most important is what is not said. They are silent on Fillon's support for continued police-state measures and the intensification of the PS' wars. On these vital issues, the pseudo-left is in full agreement with the traditional bourgeois parties of government.

LO tries to posture as an alternative, however, writing: "In the short term, faced with a wave of anti-worker statements and programs, [workers] must at least take the opportunity offered by the elections to make the voice of the working class camp heard. To the arrogance of bourgeois politicians, they can oppose their pride as workers, their demands and class consciousness. This is what the candidacy of Nathalie Arthaud, whom LO is running as a presidential candidate, means."

In fact, LO is not trying to build an alternative for the workers by running a candidate in the presidential elections. This is what was plainly obvious in 2002, when the Revolutionary Communist League (the NPA's predecessor), the Workers Party and LO collectively received 3 million votes. They then called for a vote for Chirac, supposedly to prevent the election of FN candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen—rejecting the alternative presented by the ICFI of an active boycott

by the working class to oppose Chirac's agenda of austerity and war.

LO and its allies were incapable and unwilling to do anything with the millions of votes they had in 2002, as a mass anti-war movement was developing worldwide against the preparation of the illegal invasion of Iraq in 2003. Their evolution since then indicates that they offer no alternative to the ruling class' drive towards war and far-right policies, and that workers can only oppose this very dangerous turn by opposing LO and the NPA themselves.

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