

NPA candidate Philippe Poutou holds pro-war campaign meeting in Paris

By Alex Lantier
21 April 2017

On Wednesday night, the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) held the final campaign meeting of its presidential candidate, Philippe Poutou, in the north suburbs of Paris. Around 1,000 people were at the meeting, where NPA members backed the US-led war drive against Syria and Russia and made tactical criticisms of the Socialist Party (PS), amid the historic collapse of the PS, which has been discredited by President François Hollande's administration.

The NPA speaks for a constituency within the upper-middle class that has monopolized for decades what passed for "extreme left" politics in France, just as the media falsely presented PS policies of war and austerity as representing "socialism." Led by forces of the post-1968 student movement, the NPA attracts different layers of youth. Some preparing a career in official politics dutifully posed for TV interviews in suit and tie, and others wore expensive "alternative" clothes; one guest speaker from Italy discussed a plan on gender violence she will propose to the Italian state.

Towards the working class, however, the NPA is bitterly hostile. It repeatedly supported the election of pro-austerity governments of the PS in France and of Syriza (the "Coalition of the Radical Left") in Greece. Above all, it rabidly supports the imperialist wars through which the financial dominance of the leading imperialist powers, and thus the wealth of the NPA's upper-middle class constituency, is maintained.

This was the subject of the first main contribution at Poutou's rally, by NPA spokeswoman Christine Poupin, who presented a report supposedly on internationalism, but that was in fact a full-throated defense of imperialist intervention, in particular in Syria. She launched a hysterical denunciation of the major imperialist governments in Europe and North America for not having intervened more violently to topple the Syrian government.

To try to manufacture support for NATO-backed opposition militias that are now deeply unpopular in Syria, Poupin was compelled to turn reality on its head. She claimed that due to the actions of the NATO powers,

anti-Assad militias had been "left without any means of defense, particularly anti-aircraft defense." She continued, "And all the foreign interventions in Syria actually helped [Syrian President] Bashar al-Assad to stay in power."

This is a pack of lies. Poupin's claim covers up the fact that the principal foreign intervention in Syria was that of the imperialist powers of North America and Europe, aided by the Persian Gulf oil sheikdoms. The billions of dollars they poured into arming Kurdish nationalist and Islamist opposition militias in Syria did not "help" Assad. Rather, they shattered Syria and his government, forcing tens of millions of people to flee their homes.

Poupin's attempts to present the NPA's pro-war line as a "left" criticism of the policy of the major imperialist powers were steeped in political lies. Echoing the position of the Democratic Party in the United States, Poupin denounced US policy in Syria for failing to be sufficiently aggressive in attacking Syria to overthrow Assad. This simply underscores that the NPA has managed to criticize Trump, the most far-right administration in US history, from the right.

Poupin denounced Trump's unprovoked April 7 missile strike on Syria after the alleged April 4 poison gas attack on Khan Sheikhoun. This attack—after several chemical attacks by NATO-backed opposition forces which they blamed on the Syrian regime, such as the 2013 Ghouta attack—has all the hallmarks of a CIA provocation. Nonetheless, Poupin attacked Trump's act of aggression against Syria from the right, not for its illegality, but because it was not bloody enough to destroy Assad, whom she blamed for the Khan Sheikhoun attack without presenting any evidence.

"Trump's showy gesture won't change our minds because just a week before the atrocious chemical attack at Khan Sheikhoun, Trump was letting it be known he could consider an alliance with Bashar al-Assad in the context of the so-called war on terror," Poupin declared. "Such a signal obviously encouraged the regime to pursue its crimes. So yes, faced with Assad, faced with IS, it is up to the Syrian people, and it alone, to decide on its future."

The NPA's support for imperialist war, which has become

unmistakable, in particular since it openly endorsed NATO's 2011 war in Libya, exposes it as a tool of imperialism, hostile to the working class. This is also, however, the end product of the NPA's long evolution and its relation to the PS, the reactionary big business party that has dominated what passed for the French left since the 1968 general strike. At that point, it allied with the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF), which still had a mass electoral base in the working class, to falsely present itself as socialist.

Today, nearly a half-century later, the PS is rapidly disintegrating, deeply discredited by the decades of austerity and war it has imposed on the workers, and in particular during Hollande's last five-year term. The PS is split, endorsing competing presidential candidates, ex-PS Economy Minister Emmanuel Macron and nominal PS presidential candidate Benoît Hamon. It is hated and on the verge of utter collapse, with speculation growing that it will soon follow Greece's social democratic Pasok party on the path of total disintegration.

The PS' collapse raises urgently the issue of building a genuine revolutionary socialist alternative. The petty-bourgeois layer in and around the NPA does not want to touch that question, however. Founded in 2009 on the basis of a public and overt rejection of Trotskyism by its predecessor, the petty-bourgeois Revolutionary Communist League (LCR), it has no perspective to offer amid the collapse of Europe's social democratic and Stalinist organization.

The NPA had nothing to say about its rotten relationship, over nearly a half-century, with the PS, even as this party passes through a historic collapse. While they did not openly acknowledge their close ties with the PS, the PS could always rely on the political assistance of the NPA. Poutou called for a Hollande vote in 2012, and then-NPA candidate Olivier Besancenot endorsed unsuccessful PS candidate Ségolène Royal in the 2007 elections.

The NPA's reactionary policies, taken together, have produced a situation where it is not the NPA, but Jean-Luc Mélenchon, a former post-1968 student radical and long-time PS member, who is seen as the best hope for "left" voters. He rapidly rose in polls, particularly after the April 7 strike on Syria, to which he reacted by criticizing Trump's attack. Nevertheless, neither Mélenchon nor the NPA have fundamental differences with the PS; both have worked in its periphery for decades.

When Poutou discussed his differences with Mélenchon at the Paris meeting, he attacked Mélenchon on populist lines, as a politician, based on Mélenchon's long career as a PS senator and Poutou's own career as a trade union bureaucrat at a Ford plant in Blanquefort near Bordeaux.

Claiming that politicians have "morals that are more than questionable," Poutou warned against "falling in the trap that is being laid for us, that of trying to save the institutional left, the governmental left."

Poutou added that Mélenchon, "however nice he seems to be with his militant and anti-austerity aspects, the fact is he is someone who has done politics his whole life, he was in the Socialist party for 30 years, he was in the Jospin government for a while."

Poutou's moralistic pronouncements are empty demagoguery. The NPA carries out, in the final analysis, the same essential type of nationalist, pro-imperialist politics as Mélenchon, the former PS senator, or Jospin. Poutou's attempts to distance himself from Mélenchon are in bad faith, insofar as it is well known that the differences between the PS-linked politics of Poutou and those of Mélenchon are at most marginal, and that the NPA is happy to ally itself with Mélenchon.

Indeed, asked about the NPA's differences with Mélenchon on the Public-Sénat TV channel shortly before Poutou's rally, Poupin insisted that the NPA and Mélenchon were close allies. "Those who are getting ready to vote for Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who vote Jean-Luc Mélenchon, they are great," she said. "If Jean-Luc Mélenchon reaches the run-off, that is a very very good thing... Jean-Luc Mélenchon is not our enemy."

Such remarks make clear that Poutou's denunciations of professional politicians and his attempts to present himself as a revolutionary, anti-capitalist critic of Mélenchon and the PS are so many frauds. Workers and youth seeking an alternative to the collapse of the PS will be compelled to also struggle against the petty-bourgeois, pro-war politics of the NPA.

To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>