



The second NPA Congress : what kind of party and what politics should it have ?

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Text of the leaflet that League members circulated at the NPA 2011 congress

The second NPA congress will take place February 11, 12 and 13. Two years after the founding congress, four years after the appeal by Olivier Besancenot for a new anticapitalist party, the NPA needs to take decisions on fundamental questions, most notably on the nature of the party to be built and on its politics.

We can distinguish two phases in the NPA building up to now. In a first phase, up to the first congress in 2009, the party was growing rapidly, new members came in large numbers and hundreds of new branches were set up. While probably NPA never attained the 10 000 members mark, it is however sure that the LCR succeeded in reaching broad layers much beyond its periphery. The first congress ended with important steps forward, in particular the 'founding principles'. While this document contains many vague formulations, among which IS the famous 'revolutionary transformation of society?', its overall content is a break with capitalist economy and the bourgeois state.

In this respect, The NPA is very different from the recent left parties founded in Europe like Rifondazione Comunista, Respect, die Linke, the Left Bloc in Portugal etc. It is clear that NPA was born as a centrist party and not as a reformist one. Back then we stressed that a centrist broad party is in itself a major contradiction and that this contradiction would have pulled NPA in opposite directions. To overcome this contradiction, the key was and is in our opinion the adoption of a clear action programme for class struggle, based on transitional demands, as well as the internal political debate to bring a clarification, particularly on the central question 'reform or revolution'??.

Since then, NPA has gone through a phase of stagnation and intense internal debate. Strong class struggle movements have shaken the country: the struggle against the first attacks by Sarkozy in 2007, the workers fightback against the wave of sacking and site closures in 2009, the battle against the pension 'reform' by minister Woerth in 2010. The NPA participation in these movements has been very strong at the level of rank and file members, very weak as a party. In autumn 2010, NPA has clearly appeared as a force supporting the movement, but never as an alternative leadership. In particular the criticism of TU leadership has been weak even when the possibility of a general strike and going beyond the reformist leadership of TU was concrete. NPA did not want to push for self-organisation, to build the general strike and even less to propose a political solution to the question : who should replace Sarkozy and Fillon if we kick them out ?

In the same period NPA has poured enormous energy on two electoral campaigns, for the European elections in 2009 and for regional elections in 2010. This last campaign has been the subject of an intense internal debate and has triggered the formation of three internal positions : these are the forces acting in the second congress.

Position 1 (P1, 41% of the votes) is composed of the old LCR majority, Olivier Besancenot, François Sabado, Grond, Alain Krivine, and is the current NPA leadership. It follows a similar politics as when it was leading LCR. It has no clear strategic axis, it goes in opportunistic zig-zags between adaptation and tailing the reformist leadership on one hand, and left turns under the pressure of workers and youth struggles on the other hand. Today P1 comes to the congress with a very weak document, in particular without any balance-sheet as the leadership. This is not without a reason.

The real balance-sheet is far from positive. Not only because more than half of the members at the time of the first congress have left (we are now only 3600 !) but because inside the party the lack of leadership and strategy is palpable. P1 defines itself as ?anti-capitalist? and ?unitary?, the two poles of the zig-zag. ?Unitary? means it searches by all means unity with the reformist forces, mainly with Parti de Gauche and PCF (however P1 leaves open the question of candidates for the presidential election in 2012). ?Anti-capitalist? is a guarantee to the left wing inside the party: in alliances with the reformist the form of the anticapitalist party and program will be preserved, even if in reality electoral alliances on a reformist basis have already been negotiated, in particular for the regional elections. In short, ?anti-capitalist? and ?unitary? is a code word for centrist, in the same strand of centrism as the LCR.

The weakest document proposed by P1 is certainly ?our answers to the crisis?. It is a ?hold-all? document starting with today demands up to the transition to socialism. The idea behind it is that of a peaceful transition where cooperatives, free software and other producer-consumer groups will be as important as strike committees. When the time will come, we will simply need to generalize these ?experiences? to go to a socialist system!

Position 2 (P2, 28% of the votes) regroups a part of the LCR ?left? (the other part is with P1), JCR but also groups that have joined NPA as Etincelle (the ex LO fraction), Gauche Revolutionnaire, la Commune. It defends the revolutionary content of the founding principles like the goal of socialism, the necessity of revolution, the overthrow of bourgeoisie and the smashing of the bourgeois state. There are three main axis in P2 documents : the critique of electoralism by NPA leadership and its concessions to reformist, the proposal of an action programme for the workers and the will to root NPA in the working class. We support this position even though we admit that its programmatical platform is limited and should be developed to really constitute a true revolutionary program. Our main criticisms with respect to P2 are the appalling lack of democracy inside it (a self proclaimed leadership monopolises the writing of documents and keep a lid on the internal debate, certainly to preserve the balance of forces at the top) and a certain tendency to workerism.

Position 3 (P3, 27 % of the votes) represents the followers of the political line of Christian Piquet (a long time right wing figure inside LCR). He has left LCR and NPA to join the Front de Gauche where he plays a pathetic role (even ?revolutionary? can and should join Front de Gauche because it is open to everybody). His friends in P3 propose to build NPA mainly by forming a ?political and social front?, in reality a long-term electoral alliance with reformist parties like PG and PCF. The aim would be to build a ?credible electoral pole? capable of forming a government in the framework of the current system on a ?100%to the left? line. In reality this means preparing a new reformist government! This represents the most right-wing tendency inside NPA. If they can influence the line of NPA, or if they can take the leadership, there is the obvious danger that NPA becomes a reformist party. The trajectory of Rifondazione Comunista shows that those beautiful principles will not weigh much if the whole orientation of the party remains in the framework of the bourgeois political system, in particular when the party takes part in reformist government.

Position 4 (P4, 3% of the votes) consists mainly of CRI (a left split from the Lambertists), then called CLAIRE tendency, and some PTS members (FTQI). In our discussions with PTS at the end of the 1990s, a point of difference was the question of the workers party tactic, in certain countries and historical situations. This was the case in Argentina, where there is no workers party. It is curious that these members are now inside NPA, who could indeed serve the role of a workers party. This would be a party that regroups revolutionary, Trade Union fighters and workers vanguard in the struggles - a party for the struggles, broad, democratic and combative. Inside this party, revolutionaries can continue the debate on the revolutionary program while at the same time fighting with the best elements of the workers movement, the youth, etc .

Indeed, neither CRI nor CLAIRE tendency nor P4 show any will to build NPA as a workers party. For them, the dissolution of LCR was an error and the only credible political line they suggest is an alliance with Lutte Ouvrière (disregarding the fact that LO has made electoral blocs with PS!).

While we agree with many criticisms by P4 against the current leadership of NPA and its weaknesses on reformism, we should also notice that P4 does not propose a credible perspective for building NPA. In its documents there are denunciations of reformism and the will to build a revolutionary party. But how ? To stress the principle of communism

is not enough. One of the fundamental error of P4 is its analysis of reformism. In particular, they do not understand the role of PS in the workers movement and they denounce PS as fully bourgeois. It is then difficult to understand how PG, a split from PS, is not also a bourgeois party! This error closes the door to a united front line that could allow in the struggles to detach workers from the grip of reformist leaderships.

Trapped in a logic of denunciation and proclamation, P4 could in the end find itself stuck in sectarianism. Indeed they refuse all action programme and denounce P2 because it has proposed one. However, when they write 'Our revolutionary answers to the crisis?', they do not propose concrete perspectives for the struggles, nor a concrete politics for the fight against reformism based on anything else then denouncing its betrayals. Moreover what P4 puts forward is far from a coherent and complete revolutionary program. While their transitional program claims to define 'the goal of taking power?', they forget key elements of every revolutionary program, like workers militias and workers councils. We will further analyze P4 and our criticism of their positions in a next more developed article.

To conclude, NPA is at the cross-road. On one side the development toward a reformist force, integral part of the parliamentary system and bourgeois democracy. On the other side the development towards a workers party, a party for the struggles where programmatical and strategic clarification goes on. It is very probable that the second congress will not decide in one way or the other. It is possible that NPA will in the end have a leadership based on a compromise, where P1 will have tactical agreements (or plain manoeuvres) alternatively with P2 or P3. NPA will then continue in the current blind alley where the internal debate paralyses the determined action towards the party building and the rooting in the working class and where a large portion of the energies are wasted in electoral campaigns. On our side, we will continue to fight for a different orientation for the NPA and in particular to defend the perspectives of NPA as a new leadership for the struggles.

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