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France

For the Fourth International discussion

- Debate - Building new parties of the left -

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I am contributing to the debate a specific perspective on the recent split in the NPA, marked by GA's departure to the Front de Gauche (Left Front – FdG).

Like Michael Löwy, I publicly took on the choice of double membership (GA and NPA) which to date has been accepted by both sides.

Here are:

1°) the link (on [ESSF](#)) towards:

â€¢ The text I wrote to explain why I didn't accept the arguments of the GA comrades, former leaders of the LCR, published in a Médiapart tribune (also online at the ESSF site);

â€¢ The reproduction, following this first text, of the contribution that Michael Löwy and myself made to the NPA debate to explain our dual affiliation choice, underlining the centrality of the debates about Syriza.

2°) The two texts that then illustrate the approach and positions I supported in the preparations of the NPA Congress: these are collective contributions, on behalf of a current known as "NPA-U" (U for Unitary) which brought together several dozen comrades who were close to GA or who remained in GA with dual membership (in particular, other than myself, Michael Löwy and Josette Trat). The first text appeared in pre-Congress IB no. 2. The second was distributed, after the first phase of amendments to texts and décantation of the platforms, in support of PF X at the Congress – indicating the limits of this congress, its successes, major insufficiencies and uncertainties, thus the ulterior tasks that are essential in our view.

For a unitive reorientation of the NPA

(Collective contribution by NPA-U current, published in pre-Congress IB no. 2)

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Faced with the scope of the system crisis, no current organised framework can by itself embody the solutions to the strategic problems of challenging the existing order, in a radical emancipatory and egalitarian direction. But many current activist experiences, although they are often weighed down with terrible tensions and resentments, can become a shared "heritage" and play a part in the emergence of a "political and social bloc".

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Our choice to remain in the NPA despite the divergences and tensions and, for some of us to be, for the moment, simultaneously involved in GA – is not tactical. We have shared the judgement:

- 1) That the July GM and GA's joining FdG do not provide an adequate distance to make progress in the debate, the GM also showing that resistance to the NPA's sectarian blinders was not lost;
- 2) That the perspective and experience, if we can retain the framework of fraternal debate, will enable the appearance of political and strategic issues that are legitimately engage and divide all the international radical left – and not only the NPA;
- 3) That it was incorrect to theorize the choice to enter FdG as the “historic test” making it possible to rule out the NPA and definitively mark out the “sectarians” – although in our opinion NPA was wrong to ignore, and then have a static negative opinion of the emergence of FdG and how it has evolved;
- 4) That it was incorrect, upon leaving NPA, to claim to have appropriated all its achievements; no more than it was acceptable to hear in NPA that GA had broken with NPA's founding framework to veer towards reformism.

We have tried to “not sacrifice the future” and limit damage from the split. Here are the points to be specified.

â€¢ We do not know the precise scenario of revolutionary breaks, on the national, European or international levels. The fundamental criterion is concrete refusal of ruling policies, a critique of institutions and seeking a political and social balance of power that can challenge these.

â€¢ We do not know what forms of democratic organisation, parties, trade unions associations will take shape, what will lay the basis for major (pre) revolutionary uprisings – but we do know that, for the balance of power, democratic and plural self-organisation is decisive.

â€¢ We do not know, in Greece, in France or elsewhere, what the rhythms and articulations of mobilisations will be, and we do not know how the break will happen with existing institutions, although we do know it is necessary. A unilateral declaration on leaving the Euro might be required but it is not in itself the marker of an effective and revolutionary approach. We must develop a logic that states: “We reject ruling institutions and their logic” – running the risk of “expulsion” from Europe, and we want a democratic refoundation process in Europe.

â€¢ We do not know how political consciousness and commitment will evolve, nor what will become of current organized frameworks. Splits and recompositions will mark the future, but situations of major crisis, pre-revolutionary situations and major social struggles will be what will require choosing “which side you are on”.

â€¢ We do not know what will become of FdG and its different components. But it is simplification and unworkable to replace this uncertainty with labelling and rigid, dubious criteria.

Part of NPA applies the “reformist” label with open contempt of the “Frein de gauche” (Left Brake), more of an enemy than the SP itself. It minimises the positions in resistance to the government the FdG has taken, putting the emphasis on everything problematic. We are heartened by all these distances taken from the government, and the forces within FdG working for it to be clearly a (left) opponent to the SP: the French CP abstentions aim to preserve institutional positions but PG criticises these as weakening FdG.

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We will approach the Congress based on these considerations. For the moment, we choose to proceed by amendments on the parts that seem most fundamental in our eyes. And we will produce this text as a “political contribution” to this Congress, but also more generally to the left of the left.

We agree with the need for an anticapitalist party making mass organisation of those who want “a revolutionary transformation of society”, but on the one hand NPA must be a tool for this purpose without claiming to be able to meet it alone; on the other hand, we defend the need for a veritable social and political front – in France and in Europe – commensurate with current social attacks.

We view the “unitary” position proposed by position 2 as restrictive, it lets it be understood that waging clear political campaigns with the entire organisation while proposing them “broadly” to all trade-union, political and popular organisations is enough.

Position F has taken the path of reorienting the organisation with regard to previous debates. But we estimate that it remains in the form of a solo journey, along the line “I’d love to give you a ride but don’t have a car”! Finally characterising FdG as a “problem” saying that it is “indispensable to ensure building a party independent of the Front de Gauche” is either breaking into open doors (also building a party independent of AL, LO etc) or opposing what is for now complementary actions: emerging from the NPA crisis, while taking all its place in the debates and regroupment actions of anti-capitalists and their efforts to transform and broaden something that can become a credible left opposition to the SP.

From this standpoint, it is obvious that the question of our relations with FdG and with its components is central. If it is legitimate, taking the weight of the CP and PG into account, to think we can have a greater influence on FdG from outside than from inside, a positive outlook is still required towards FdG’s evolution, not as a “problem” but as a potential to change the balance of power in France and in Europe. And whatever the opinion as to the form and substance of the outlook chosen by GA, and its conditions of application, it is counter-productive to deform its practical outlook and to deny that it maintains an organisational and political independence in what is only a Front. It is on the basis of the timetables of struggles and internal debates in FdG that all these questions can be cleared up.

Finally, after the internal tempest we have just gone through, it is far from useless to insist on the vital need, beyond differences, to rebuild a common framework for debates within the party. Because our type of activism and debate also points to the type of alternative society we want. As a party, no matter how enlightened, we don’t have to sell a “keys in hand” society but pay attention to all experiences and reflections that give strength to hopes and principles of another way of live, of production, of exchange – enriching them through our viewpoints. So, in action and in debate, we must open up and debate with others, showing first and foremost that NPA can become the primary arena for expressing these principles: pluralism, internal democracy, ability to reach out towards precarious milieus and those affected by xenophobia, collective elaboration, mutual listening, refusal to caricature different positions, feminisation, etc.

NPA-U Declaration for February 2013 NPA Congress

Faced with the crisis of the NPA (which does not come down to the departure of the GA comrades) and the risk of the disappearance of the initial “new anticapitalist party” project, we have chosen not to present our own platform and to support PF X. The purpose of this text is to explain this choice to express what is disturbing us on our own and contribute to debates that must continue after the Congress.

Challenges, limits and priorities for our aims at this congress

This will be a crucial stage, with limited short-term aims: namely beginning to emerge from the crisis while avoiding the worst (getting locked into sectarian orientations that would signify the end of NPA). In this context, we have to assume a Congress that won't be satisfactory in terms of needed balance sheets: for an emergency congress after the crisis we have undergone, proceeding through balance-sheets could only divide us, with no real clarification. Although balance sheets are necessary, distinguishing two types of concerns:

Over the very short length of the Congress, we did not have the means to carry out such debate, which had to be pluralistic and would require time.

On the one hand, the needed reflection on modes of functioning is part and parcel of political and "identity" issues. PF W is raising some real questions to be debated. But a congress is not the best context to make progress on this. However, it will have to form a leadership entrusted with making progress on these questions through future conferences, without leadership elections at state: we must impel our reflection on the mode of debate, on pluralism, on democratic life in NPA, on enriching its experiences and the type of non-dogmatic education, thus really incorporating the "richest" from controversies and experiences. On the other hand, we will need orientation and programmatic elaboration balance sheets. These will have to fall within the fraternal mutualisation of experiences, failures, and assets for the radical left in an international comparative process.

In other words, we join in with the PF X approach, emphasising the immediate orientation as the best way of also making (a bit) of progress also regarding our functioning and our crisis. In this context, we have concentrated on essential points that are subjects of debate, firstly among revolutionaries:

• Challenges in Greece and the emergence of Syriza;

• Linking up struggles with a political perspective – the challenge of an anti-austerity government;

• The need to address all components of the left that are not taking part in the government, both in terms of struggles to wage and for a political alternative to build, stimulating self-organisation of struggles and controlled by these.

Limits to progress...

Although the report-writing procedure has made it possible to involve more activists, it has resulted in texts that are too long, confusing and not very readable. This makes it harder for activists to get interested in issues at the Congress.

We want to contribute to a strong majority for PF X and implementing an NPA leadership that will strive to carry out:

? Deepening debates and reflections: • on NPA's functioning and its failures; • on the evolution of PCF, PG and FdG – by asking for meetings and evaluations with comrades who have left us, the Alternatifs, etc... • on other composite formations in Europe and elsewhere – with comrades involved and affected;

? A radically unitary approach: develop a voluntarist attitude towards left organisations that refuse the government's austerity policies (components of FG as well as LO, MOC, AL...) and propose unity to them in terms of struggles, but also in political terms in so far as they oppose the SP and social liberalism.

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? Rebuild collective frameworks for work and interventions that go beyond suspicions and confrontations linked to tendency jockeying to put an end to (or limit) paralysis, or even self-destruction of the party.

We need safeguards against two perils that the recent period has illustrated for revolutionaries:

â€¢ Self-designation as “revolutionaries”, giving lessons to everyone else, confront to denounce (never to listen, learn, or broaden our horizons in terms of experience and outlook) ... with the consequent marginalisation and powerlessness that is not only the outcome of difficult circumstances and the “others” (Stalinists and reformists).

â€¢ The “realistic” engulfment in the management of the system and alliances to win elections ...

But above all, we must not confuse transitional approaches and explorations with actual engulfment.

We are all NPA members out of conviction because NPA embodies a capital not to be lost – even though, as we said in our previous contribution: “Faced with the scope of the system crisis, no current organised framework can alone bear solutions to the strategic problems of challenging the existing order, in a radical emancipatory and egalitarian direction”.

Here are the modest objectives we have set for this congress, for a real political reorientation of the NPA.