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France

Elements for a balance sheet of the NPA

- Debate - Building new parties of the left -

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The ongoing discussion on the balance sheets of building broad anti-capitalist parties at the next IC early March, gives us the opportunity to set the debates of the second conference of the NPA, our own balance sheet, in a more global context. This text is an individual contribution to this vital work that requires confronting different points of view in order to draw lessons from them.

The debate is not about the model or the type of "party we want", a "Bolshevik" type of party or a broad one. It is rather a debate on the practical and concrete ways to bring about the emergence of parties for the revolutionary transformation of society from the present-day global upheavals. We are in an unprecedented situation. The coordinates from which the revolutionary movement thought its prospects are disrupted, new unstable ones emerge from the disorder of capitalist globalization that create new conditions for the direct political intervention of the workers and the peoples. We must put everything back on the drawing-board. The experience of the NPA offers, from this point of view, a particular interest insofar as it comes at a pivotal moment, the years when a new phase of the capitalist crisis began.

The ambiguities of the prospect of broad parties and our balance sheet

The discussion on the crisis of the NPA partakes of the balance sheet of the perspective made by the FI in 1992 of building broad parties and recomposing the left. All the currents and militants involved in the founding of the NPA did not necessarily share that perspective, including the author of this text, but they were united by the same underlying objective : to respond to the crisis of the workers' and the revolutionary movement, to work to build the beginnings of a mass anti-capitalist and revolutionary party. The group of leaders who initially controlled the founding of the NPA and later founded the Anti-Capitalist Left (GA) considered and still considers themselves, I believe, as the true representatives of this perspective. I do not mean that their evolution was written in advance, but the ambiguities of this orientation – a party independent from the anti-neoliberals or a recomposition on the left – their approach "from above", contributed to their own failure and, consequently, to our crisis.

One of their mistakes was their inability to understand that the political situation which had led to formulate this policy belonged to the past, whatever else we may think. 2008 opened a new period.

Trapped in their own illusions and then their... disappointments they broke with the project that had brought us together, without even debating, sparing themselves from discussing their own balance sheet both at a time when they were the leadership of the NPA or in the past year, since they formed a public faction.

During the last months which led to the split, the leaders of the GA strived to create a bad climate without even discussing the heart of the issue : what led them from the debate of the national conference of June 2011 as to whether the party should continue or stop the discussions with the Left Front concerning the presidential elections to their decision to join its ranks.

The manner in which the negotiations were conducted on financial matters clearly illustrates their break with the project of the NPA initiated by the LCR. Far from being a legal dispute on inheritance rights, it was a political discussion. The congress of dissolution of the LCR chose to bequeath its property to a political project that led to the founding of the NPA. The ad-hoc committee designed to pass on that property had a mere legal function. Thus, it is to the NPA that the LCR gave the democratic right to decide of the use to which this heritage was put.

To challenge this democratic right is in conflict with the decisions of the Congress of dissolution of the LCR.

Therefore, our respective balance sheets do not have the same starting point. Ours is that of those who believe in the necessity of an anti-capitalist party independent from the reformists, regardless of the tactical means that such a goal might necessitate.

We were right to dare!

The starting point is to say, unequivocally, that we were right to launch this battle.

It remains true that there will be no emergence of a revolutionary anti-capitalist party without a policy to overcome past divisions to gather all the forces and to work to implement a program, a perspective to build an effective and democratic tool able to associate, to lead the struggles generated by the resistance to the crisis in which the policy of the ruling classes plunges society.

The NPA was, and still is, an attempt to answer the crisis of the workers' and the revolutionary movement in a context which was and is no longer that of the Nineties that followed the collapse of the USSR. It was neither a political move or the illusion that we would be able to fill the space left by the decline of the PCF by putting water in our wine.

It takes up the objectives of the early 90s, to overcome the marginality Stalinism had forced us into, to free them from the mistakes of the past, strategically non-delimited parties, while adapting them to the new social and political context, to new opportunities.

The foundation of the NPA occurred at the crossroads between the end of a period with the fall of the Wall and the beginning of a new one opened by the crisis. The confrontation of those two ways led to the split of the initiators of the GA with the project of the NPA.

The stages of a crisis or the development of the contradictions

The history of the first four years of the NPA is the development of that contradiction, which was initially not formulated, until the split. The core of the party's leadership, believing the illusion that it was possible to use the popularity of Olivier Besancenot to develop a policy of recomposition on the left by betting on the rivalry between the PC and PG, another illusion, were unable to stimulate a real policy of construction.

There was, as a corollary, the excessive personalization Olivier Besancenot wished to get rid of by refusing to be candidate in 2012.

The paralysis was accentuated by the formation of the Left Front a few months after the founding of the NPA. The lack of strategic vision of the core of the party's leadership was aggravated by the illusions about the possibilities of playing off the PG against the PCF. In this game, they were outmatched and, quite naturally if one may say, eventually fell under their control.

The 2012 presidential election was the moment when the contradictions at work crystallised. Olivier's refusal to

continue to play that political game left the field free to the development of that contradiction. The party's core leadership had lost seeing no other exit than a headlong rush forward.

The NPA could not be a policy move implemented with as sole strategy that of left recomposition.

The only content that our project could take was and is that of a process in response to the crisis of the workers' and revolutionary movement confronted to a new period.

Our crisis is also the global crisis of the far left

When we founded the NPA we dared to live up to the new opportunities arising from the changing political relationship of forces. At the end of the first stage of our existence it is clear that our forces were too small, the illusions too great and the actual relationship of forces have quickly caught up with us to remind us of the reality that many refused to see. These weaknesses and illusions have expressed themselves in the attraction exercised by the Left Front on a large minority of comrades.

But we cannot discuss this without also drawing a balance sheet of the other tendencies, both French and international, of the revolutionary movement.

If we take the example of France, it is impossible not to wonder about the reasons for the far left's failure to take a significant step in 1995 when Laguiller won more than 5% of the votes in the presidential election, and in 2002, AL and OB got together more than 10% of the votes. To end with Philippe Poutou and Nathalie Arthaud getting, together, less than 2% of the vote.

How can we explain that Lutte Ouvrière and the LCR got together in 1999, 5 MEPs without the far left taking a significant step ?

One can not simply invoke the relationships of forces, the objective conditions, even if they did have an impact. No leadership has been able to formulate a perspective to unify the revolutionary movement.

The leadership of the LCR and the NPA had the immense merit of trying to make a decisive step forward. The relationships of forces have boxed us into the corner, for a time, but we have not lost. Provided we get rid of a vision "from above" of the recomposition on the left.

Back to the 2009 FI Congress

It is not without interest to go back to the Congress because I believe that the changes we need to take into account stress the importance of noting the break with the arguments of 92, something the last congress has not done clearly enough. It was the purpose of the amendments to François Sabado's text on "The role and tasks of the FI" that I then formulated.

The point was to stress that the issue of broad parties could not be stated in the same terms as in 1992 for two reasons.

First, the overall economic, social and political situation is no longer the same, we must take the measure of the "tipping of the world" to rediscuss our perspectives and our tasks. Next, experiences have been made, results of which oblige us to stress the necessary independence from the politics of the old reformist parties and the importance of formulating, advocating and implementing programmatic and strategic orientations fully independent from the new anti-neoliberal forces which have emerged.

It did not seem right to me to write Â« We confirm the essential of our choices at the last World Congress in 2003 concerning the building of broad anti-capitalist parties. Â»

The content given in this formula should have and must be enriched by a critical assessment of the different experiences (particularly in Brazil and in Italy, and today that of the Red Green Alliance, and also the NPA) of building broad anti-capitalist parties since our last World Congress in 2003.

Overall, the Fourth International is facing a new phase. This requires to specify and redefine its tasks.

The various attempts to address the crisis of the labour movement can only be successful if we learn the lessons of past failures in order to give ourselves the means through which we can help build mass parties, tools for the workers' struggles in the perspective of socialism. There is no model, each process of regroupment and construction must take into account the national specificities and relationships of forces, but the political and programmatic content of our work and intervention in the various processes must be clearly defined: independence from bourgeois institutions, independence from the latest versions of antineoliberal reformism, united front policy and defense of a policy to respond to the crisis of capitalism challenging capitalist private property and putting forward the cancellation of the debt and the nationalization of the financial system under the control of the workers and the population.

The lessons from Greece and Denmark

The current upheavals in the wake of the crisis which began in 2008, the spread of the debt crisis, product of a capitalism on credit and out of breath create a new situation on account of the fact that the dramatic dead-end to which the policy of the ruling classes and of their states leads becomes increasingly obvious for very broad layers of workers. A fundamental question begins to arise, that of power. This is true for the process of the Arab revolutions but it is also true in Europe. The terrible social regression in which the troika has plunged Greece but also Portugal, Spain and soon all the countries of Europe reveals the aberration of austerity policies that have no other purpose than to maintain profits. It also shows that the struggle to safeguard the rights of workers and popular classes implies deep transformations, incursions into private property, the cancellation of the debt and the creation of a public banking monopoly.

This issue of power has taken a concrete turn in Greece because of the collapse of the troika parties among which the PASOK, a collapse which places an anti-neoliberal party in position to maybe form the future government of the country. The question is not to make predictions, but to have a policy. This implies that anti-capitalists must be able to answer the governmental issue, that of a government against austerity, for the rights of workers and the people, for the cancellation of the debt and the creation of a public banking monopoly. This perspective is based on the political mobilization and organization of workers and the people; it is at the heart of our struggle to gather forces against austerity policies. It is also inseparable from the building of an anti-capitalist party independent from the reformists.

The lessons from Denmark combine with that of Greece to plead for our full independence. Voting the budget of a bourgeois government is more than a mistake, doing this is to cross the red line, especially if it is an austerity budget.

Working at the regroupment of anti-capitalists and revolutionaries, developing a united front policy against austerity posing the question of power, that of a government against austerity and debt, interpellating antineoliberal forces so as not to leave them the monopoly of political response, debating in trade unions, associations, mobilizations the link between the latter and the political prospects seem to me the main lines around which our policy is articulated.

A conference to revive the NPA

There was a majority in favour of this orientation at our last conference but the majority did not succeed in uniting our party after the shock of the split.

This split continues to maintain a logic of division by nourishing an old reflex consisting in keeping opportunism at bay through revolutionary phrase mongering.

Two issues have crystallized the discussions: the continuity of our project of regrouping anti-capitalists and the question of the links between our united front policy and the question of power. Both feed one another.

Bringing together our party implies clearing strategic ambiguities on the question of power without falling into "revolutionary" proclamations and linking the issue of the political alternative, the government against austerity to build the unity of our camp and a left opposition to the government Hollande-Ayrault.

Our conference has turned a page and created the conditions to go further in our approach to unite our party by implementing the majority orientations while continuing the debate to convince and lead in practice.

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