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France

# Fifth Congress of the NPA: A door opened to hope

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**Taking stock of the fourth congress of France's Nouveau parti anticapitaliste (NPA) in 2018, León Cremieux wrote the following: "The Fourth Congress of the NPA has ended leaving a situation which is open and, at the same time, closed. The next few months will tell in which direction it evolves." In that congress the biggest platform, with 49.72% of the votes, was an inch away from obtaining the majority and the lack of that 0.28% of votes became a real difficulty in keeping the party alive.**

Although among the other six platforms presented at that congress the strongest stood at 17%, the majority/minority that had the responsibility of taking the party forward has been confronted over these years with a factional dynamic where the rest of currents, without political agreement among themselves offering an alternative to the majority, united to block its political orientation. And over time, each faction has been consolidating its own structure, autonomous from the organic structure of the NPA, with the aim of turning the NPA into a front of factions (or mini parties) in total contradiction with the original project of the NPA.

In this context, for nearly five years the NPA has nonetheless been able to move forward, with a leadership that, despite the obstacles, has managed to keep the party alive, guarantee its public appearance, sectoral intervention and participation in unitary dynamics and electoral campaigns (whose orientation has always been defined in a National Conference, where the leadership always won the majority). At the last (26-27 June 2021), the departure of the CCR-Permanent Revolution faction modified the situation somewhat, giving more room for manoeuvre to the leadership, allowing the development of a campaign with a radical and unitary identity that, although it did not translate into votes, attracted sympathy from broad sectors of activists who, during the parliamentary elections, demanded that Jean-Luc Mélenchon's la France insoumise (LFI) party prioritize an agreement with the NPA instead of the Socialist Party. A sympathy that also translated into an influx of new activists.

Thus, after the fourth congress the situation was open, it is true, but it was heavily burdened by the sectarian dynamics of the factions, in permanent competition with the majority of the NPA, blocking debate and political reflection and undermining the dynamics of the party (with their own funds, websites and structures, as well as public appearances in demonstrations differentiated from the NPA although always using the logo of the NPA, and so on).

Hence, at this congress, in addition to the political orientation, the fundamental problem posed to the NPA was to get out of the quagmire to which the different factions had led it: to break with a factional dynamic, which the different currents justified in the name of plurality and internal democracy, and to reaffirm the initial project of the NPA. Not an easy task in a party where respect for plurality and internal democracy is part of its DNA. And because, for a good part of the activists and those who supported Platform B, the possibility of excluding anyone due to political differences was inconceivable. Hence, the majority chose to hold out until the critical point of the congress so that the group of delegates could appreciate *in situ* the seriousness of the internal fracture and the impossibility of continuing with the factions integrated in Platform C.

How to put an end to this situation? The majority of the outgoing leadership (Platform B (Christine Poupin, Philippe Poutou, Pauline Salingue and Olivier Besancenot): 48.5% of votes) stated from its initial document that above and beyond the political orientation, continuing in the same group required agreement on the type of party to be built and the rules of functioning. In a word, to put an end to the system of *taifas* (fiefdoms) [1] that the party had become, which the text of the platform summed up as follows:

A party useful to its militants and to the exploited class must be a place of elaboration, of balance sheets of common experiences, a collective intellectual force capable of developing analyses and developing interventions in synch with the real dynamics of the class struggle.

We need a political tool capable of elaborating, of reflecting freely, we need tactical flexibility, experimentation, but also the sharing of our experiences to learn from them collectively.

We must resist the temptation to preserve the apparatus as an end in itself, for it is illusory to think that the NPA can continue to exist as before.

Without radical change, it can die little by little, demoralizing some, making others believe that they are taking small steps on the road to the constitution of a revolutionary party.

In fact, the factions push towards sectarian isolation and identity, seeing in the other non-revolutionary organizations of the workers' movement only political adversaries to fight at all times and places, and extending this vision to internal disagreements. Any attempt to update our programmatic achievements to respond to new questions is thus dismissed as reformism or even treason.

Organizational issues are a concentration of political choices. We must realize that the existence of permanent factions is actually the juxtaposition of different organizations with different and even contradictory political projects.

Therefore, staying in a single organization is purely artificial. We must act on this separation that already exists in fact or implement measures capable of reconstituting a true party. The nature of these measures can be discussed at the congress; they are not administrative measures, but a political agreement to establish a certain level of centralized democracy that authorizes a right of tendency and a right of faction but limits the organizational structures that compete with those of the NPA and the systematic public expression of the micro parties that only belong to the NPA when they use its logo.

It is not a question of a position of principle (we are not opposed to the right of factions) but of re-establishing a functioning based on democratic centralism, of taking note of the state of degradation of militant relations and of the divergences, at this time immovable, of the orientations implemented by the factions so that they compete with those of the party.

Undoubtedly, this strong will to recover a situation of normality in the party, already announced during the summer university of the NPA, was what led the rest of the factions, except for the minority platform A (6.1%), to create a joint opposition grouping in Platform C (45.6% of votes, whose most representative figures are Gaël Quirantes and Damien Scali) in order to try to force a relationship of forces that would block the situation in Congress and, in this way, ensure that it continue as before. An outcome that Platform B ruled out in all circumstances.

Therefore, given the probability of a split, a local NPA committee, that of Tarn, proposed creating a parity commission in order to reach an agreement between all the platforms on the criteria that should govern the life of the NPA. In the five meetings that took place, the different factions that made up platform C did not at any point give up continuing to act as independent micro parties within the NPA.

In view of this, on the second day of the congress, after a debate plagued by accusations, lies and unprecedented verbal violence on the part of the factions towards the majority in the debate on the political situation and on the party model, before starting the voting session [2], Platform B requested a suspension to decide in a platform meeting on the critical situation of the congress and its future. The conclusion, a resolution adopted by 100 of the 102 delegates (one abstention and one non-vote), was that under these conditions it was not possible to continue in the same organization with Platform C, which was communicated to the other two Platforms who, for their part, continued the congress in separate meetings. In summary, the resolution reads as follows;

Since the fiction of a common political organization is crumbling, it is time to conclude, with the adoption of this text, that we are separate organizations. This means that, after this congress, we will no longer be organized together within the NPA, even if we have to cohabit temporarily for some time. Consequently, we will not choose a common leadership with Platform C at this congress. We want to continue in dialogue with comrades who want to keep the NPA alive as a living and democratic organization, without the permanent public "factions".

We will continue our lives separately: on the one hand, those who have kept the NPA alive for years, its campaigns -especially presidential- its democratic bodies, its public expression, the coordination of its activities, its bookstore; on the other, factions that already have their own life and disagree with the project that presided over the founding of the NPA (although they intend to use its logo).

We consider that we embody the continuity of a political current, through an anti-capitalism that articulates the defence of revolutionary ideas and the need to build the unity of our class. It is this current that has led the LCR, and then the NPA, to become an established and recognized party in the national and local political landscape. We cannot squander this achievement, and we claim its name and its flag (Resolution: "Acter la séparation, continuer le NPA. Construire une organisation utile à notre camp")

This has put an end to an unsustainable situation for the NPA in a context of acute social, political, democratic and environmental crisis, of an authoritarian drift of the political regime and of a reactionary and xenophobic wave in ascent crystallized in the electoral advance of the extreme right, posing more than ever the urgency of building a revolutionary alternative from the perspective of recomposing the social and organizational fabric of the popular sectors, the mass organizations and of the left through a unitary policy to reverse the current unfavourable relationship of forces. A policy totally opposed to the sectarian self-affirmation proposed by Platform C.

## Fundamental political divergences

The core of the political divergences of Platform B with Platform C at this congress can be summarized on two levels. The first is understanding the crisis. While for Platform B the crisis occurs in a disadvantageous situation – of unfavourable relationship of forces – for the popular sectors and can lead to the worst possible scenario, for Platform C, the crisis in which the capitalist system is immersed [the objective factors] “could converge and lead to real social revolutions”.

Hence, in terms of tasks, for Platform B the fundamental task is to work to recompose the structures of the workers', associative, feminist, LGBTI, environmental and other movements; and to do so with an independent and unitary politics with both the mass organizations and the political forces of the left, while for Platform C, to ensure that the anger caused by the crisis in the popular sectors becomes political consciousness, the way forward is political campaigns by the party to set our class in motion, promoting the construction of a front of revolutionaries grouped around a project of self-affirmation and dogmatic denunciation of reformism.

Beyond that, the divergences with Platform C range from international politics (denouncing the unitary campaign of solidarity with the Ukrainian resistance under the slogan “Putin's troops out of Ukraine”, which demonstrated on 10 December in Paris [\[3\]](#)), to the decision to participate in the unitary base structures Nupes inherited from the parliamentary elections, to the building of social movements such as feminist, ecologist or LGBTI; but above all it should be made clear that the unitary policy in relation to the Nupes does not represent in any case - as was proven during the discussions for an electoral agreement for the parliamentary elections - envisaging either in the short or long term the dissolution of the NPA in Nupes, but quite the opposite: starting from the conviction that these structures can evolve in the right direction and not fall prey to the ups and downs and electoral interests of la France Insoumise, the more recognition the militant activity of the NPA obtains in them. [\[4\]](#)

## Moving forward

As the above-mentioned resolution points out, for a time and until the separation is resolved, two separate sectors will coexist in the NPA. Platform B concluded the congress alone and approved both the guidance documents and the various motions submitted to the congress, electing a new leadership that includes 19 new members (45%) and 24 women (56%), with four spokespersons (Christine Poupin, Pauline Salingue, Philippe Poutou and Olivier Besancenot), guaranteeing the NPA website and publications and announcing a rally in Paris for 17 January 2023. Platform C continued its sectarian discourse and extensive smear campaign. It remains to be seen whether the common shell within which the different factions were gathered will be able to coexist now the rules of the game that all of them wanted to impose on the NPA have disappeared.

In the short term, we will probably see two processes from now on. On the one hand, the result of the talks on the separation with platform C and the attitude adopted by platform A (which in principle is inclined to continue in the NPA with platform B); on the other hand, the congress is the starting point - and not the conclusion - of a process of separation with the currents-factions-groups. Depending on local realities, everyone will have to choose whether, at the level of their respective committee or locality, they can continue to work – or even meet – with the comrades who, having voted for Platform C, are not part of sectors organized in the current groups-factions which compose it. From what we know, there are already committees in which activists who supported different platforms in the run-up to the congress have decided to continue together.

But regardless of how the situation is resolved internally, the importance of the congress is that putting an end to factional dynamics gives the NPA a new breath to deal with the current political situation.

A complex political situation in which the full-fledged offensive of the Macron government (with the pension reform as

its standard), but also with an increasingly active violent extreme right, as seen this December, requires being free of internal ties to be able to act with the capacity for initiative.

The turning point that this congress represents in the history of the NPA also comes at a political moment in which the terrain on the French left is moving and which demands political reflection, tactical flexibility and capacity for dialogue with the other political forces. Undoubtedly, in the coming weeks and months, the NPA will have to resume in a more serene and constructive atmosphere debates on aspects of strategy, tactics and party building that due to the need to respond to factional pressure were impossible to develop until now. More so in a context in which the left camp is in continuous development, as shown by the presidential election campaign and, above all, the parliamentary elections with the creation of Nupes and the loss of hegemony of social liberalism in this coalition.

The electoral success of Nupes also meant the emergence of new sectors in politics that continue to militate in a unitary and open way in the local Nupes groups, even though the reality of this is unequal according to localities and the weight of the political forces in them, and until now we cannot speak of a Nupes organized and coordinated at the national level. The development of these collectives is autonomous where they exist. In any case, they constitute a space in which to integrate, share space and develop unitary initiatives and debates with the activists (party or non-party) that are involved.

On the other hand, nothing is stable in any party today. Although having their own peculiarities, all the waters are turbulent: both in the French Communist Party (split in two before the next congress) and the LFI (in full conflict after the election of the new leadership [5] excluding figures such as Clémentine Autin, Alexis Corbière, François Ruffin and Éric Coquerel, as well as the very “moderate” position of the leadership vis-à-vis one of its members condemned for violence against his companion, which has already provoked collective resignations from LFI. The question is all the more sensitive as the person in question appeared, before his conviction was made public, as the most probable successor to Mélenchon). With regard to the Socialist Party, it remains to be seen how its congress (27-29 January 2023) will conclude, with two alternatives aiming to replace the current leadership, and how this will affect Nupes.

Finally, from January, the social question will be at the centre of the agenda. The pension reform desired by Macron should have been announced on 15 December (the deadline was postponed to 10 January following the unanimous agreement of all the unions to mobilize from January), the breakdown of public services (education, hospitals and so on), the working conditions prevailing in the latter, not to mention the high cost of living or the coming energy restrictions – all of this defines a political situation where, in order to prevent the social unrest that is accumulating fuelling the embers of the far right, the social and political left must promote unitary initiatives against Macron and his world. It is on this ground that the NPA must prove its usefulness, and its future is undoubtedly at stake. After this 5th congress, a door of hope has opened for the NPA.

Translated by [International Viewpoint](#) from [Viento Sur](#).

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[1] Reference to the fragmentation of power after the dissolution of the Caliphate of Cordoba in 1031, in the Muslim part of the Iberian Peninsula and the formation of multiple kingdoms (emirates) of independent *taifas*, making the whole unmanageable, *taifa* designating a party, group or faction.

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[2] Nevertheless after voting on (and approving) the report of the Mandates Commission thereby legitimating the elected delegates. *Translators'*

*Note*

[3] Union des Ukrainiens de France - Russie Liberté - Socialistes russes contre la guerre - Association des Géorgiens en France - Géorgie vue de France - Collectif pour une Syrie libre et démocratique CPSLD - Coordination des Syriens de France - CSDH Iran - A Manca - Assemblée européenne des citoyens - Association autogestion - Aplutsoc - ATTAC France - Cedetim - Club Politique Bastille - Confédération générale du travail (CGT) - Coopératives Longo Mai - Éditions Syllepse - Émancipation Lyon 69 - Ensemble ! - Europe Écologie Les Verts (EELV) - Entre les lignes entre les mots - Fondation Copernic - Forum civique européen - Fédération syndicale unitaire (FSU) - Gauche démocratique et sociale - Gauche écosocialiste - Ligue des droits de l'Homme (LDH) - L'Insurgé - Les Humanités - Mémorial 98 - Mouvement national lycéen (MNL) - Nouveau Parti anticapitaliste (NPA) - Pour l'Ukraine, pour leur liberté et la nôtre - Pour une écologie populaire & sociale (PEPS) - Régions et peuples solidaires (RPS) - Rejoignons- nous - Réseau syndical international de solidarité et de luttes - RESU France (Réseau européen de - solidarité avec l'Ukraine)- Réseau Penser l'émancipation - Union syndicale Solidaires

[4] Nupes - Nouvelle Union populaire écologique et sociale - New Ecological and Social People's Union, a left-wing alliance of political parties created to contest the 2022 parliamentary elections.

[5] By means of a representative assembly of 160 people from the LFI, of which almost nobody knew the existence and in which the hard core of the LFI participated, the rest being composed of people drawn by lot. A total absurdity of internal democracy, which led Ruffin to ask whether this is the democratic model of the VIth Republic that France Insoumise advocates.