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France

Olivier Besancenot will not be NPA candidate in 2012

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On the 2nd May, the leadership of the New Anti-capitalist Party was informed that Olivier Besancenot, their best-known spokesperson, would not be the party's candidate in the presidential elections for 2012. It was Olivier's successful campaigns in 2002 and 2007 for the LCR (Revolutionary Communist League, French section of the Fourth International) that had laid the basis for the creation of the NPA. After a further meeting of the Executive Committee on the 4th of May, Olivier sent this letter to all NPA members.

"Do not forget the men who will serve you best are those who you chose from those among you, living their own lives, suffering the same ills.

Challenge yourselves just as much as the ambitious newcomers, while others who consider only their own interests always end up being regarded as indispensable ...

Choose instead those who do not seek your votes; the most important virtue is modesty and it is for voters to recognise their chosen representatives, and not for them to push themselves forward. "

Appeal of the Central Committee of the National Guard of the Paris Commune, March 25, 1871.

Comrades,

I will not be the candidate of the New Anti-Capitalist Party in the presidential election of 2012. This is a political decision that I have taken. And if I want today to pass the baton to one of our comrades, I am not saying that I no longer wish to be involved in all our struggles; quite the contrary. Rather, I believe that the NPA has an opportunity to establish itself on a new basis, in accordance with the project of emancipation which more than ever motivates me.

Firstly, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those in the NPA - and in the LCR before - who have been actively involved in the collaborative work for which I have served as spokesperson these last ten years. To all the comrades of the local branches who put up posters, distributed leaflets, organised rallies (and who have always welcomed us with open arms), to those who gathered signatures for our candidacy in 2002 and again in 2007, and those comrades in the leadership who worked on the arguments, orientation, communications and security, to all of you I want to say thank you. This team has taught me a great deal and contributed a huge amount throughout this funny experience of being a spokesperson.

I have tried, for my part, to do my level best in order to acquaint a broader audience with our ideas and beliefs, and I fully intend to continue to do so in order to communicate our program, promote our actions and to increase our vote. NPA activists and, more generally, all those fighting to change the world can count on my commitment.

This is therefore a political decision, one that should not come as a great surprise. For many months I have been one of those warning our party against the political risks of excessive, exaggerated, personalisation. That ideas are embodied within a specific social and political context, and that it is necessary to delegate the tasks of activists through public representation – for a specific and time-limited mandate – is one thing. It's quite another to play the media game as a substitute for real grass-roots action in the class struggle.

We organise daily in our workplaces, in struggle, at election time, to defend the prospect of finally ridding society of alienation, exploitation and oppression. Emancipation from contemporary forms of servitude necessarily implies a break with the current system. This rupture presupposes a growing popular engagement with politics. Whenever possible, this break must intervene here and now, without holding back its seething revolutionary promise until tomorrow.

This means that here and now we call, tirelessly and conscientiously, on all those anonymous citizens to take ownership of their destiny. That is why we always exalt the popular classes to burst onto the political scene by breaking the speakers erected by politicians in order to keep us away from the arena where our lives are played out. Wherever we operate, we carry this original and subversive message to housing estates, businesses, schools, the universities, street markets, in protests during the elections. This message is the hallmark of our party, and we must not tarnish it in the name of some electoral reflex.

We created a sensation when the LCR had the audacity to introduce a young worker, a postman, in the 2002 presidential election. Let us once again cause a sensation today with other unknown candidates during the next elections who will highlight all that we really are: a collective tool and a heterogeneous group. To strive to demonstrate that we do not need politicians to express ourselves, to understand and propose solutions, is a progressive act. To reassure themselves by thinking we should "play safe" would yield, on the contrary, to pernicious conservative instincts which should be left to others. However, we do not conceive of political like the other parties do.

Such a move would also, in my view, resolve an untenable contradiction, which sees us denouncing a system where politics has become a form of marketing on the one hand while on the other involuntarily integrating ourselves into the traditional political scene by embedding our movement and ideas in the ritual debates. That risks eventually transforming us into a caricature of ourselves, even into an alibi for the failures of the system.

Like any of you, this is a prospect which I find personally unbearable. I do not want to feel like I am one of the traditional politicians in the eyes of the general public, something which has influenced our position in recent years. My continuing to work in the post office - an activity that I never let go - is not a long term serum powerful enough to counteract the dynamics continuously imposed on the consensual electoral battlefield and in the media. The young worker who set out to attack party politics in 2002 inevitably became, in 2007, someone who "was playing politics while continuing to work" and probably the person who "does politics tout court" in 2012. I am a militant and an activist and I want to remain so. Releasing me from this contradiction is the best guarantee that I will be able to continue to continue the fight of the NPA in the public arena, but in a different way.

So I ask you to be supportive of my choice, recognising it as a desire that the NPA can finally establish itself. Find yourselves not a familiar name but a reappropriated collective identity which can be deployed on a more conscious and more consistent basis. More aware of the need to carry on a revolutionary, internationalist, lively and open project which is clearly distinct from the present system. More constant in its overall activity in everyday life, intervening constantly in workplaces, housing estates, and among the youth, and leading an active resistant network of social movements - around work, anti-racism, environmentalism, feminism and so on.

The presidential election will take place within a year. This gives us time to prepare and make 2012 a major step in our rebuilding process.

I am prepared to invest myself 100% in our party, the NPA, and to support as best as I can our candidate so that we can intervene effectively in the next presidential election, for we must continue to communicate our message to millions of people instead of shutting ourselves off from the world. The moments of uncertainty which the labor movement in France has been experiencing should not overshadow the unstable political situation largely caused by

the global crisis which the capitalist system has faced over the last three years.

The Arab revolutions prove one thing: the winds of history are shifting and can turn quickly.

Revolutionary greetings,

Olivier