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France

“The worker Poutou succeeds the postman Besancenot”

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Philippe Poutou was designated the NPA candidate for the 2012 presidential election at the National Conference held on the 25th and 26th June. Poutou is a worker from Ford's in Bordeaux. This article was published in the regional newspaper *Sud-Ouest* on Sunday 26th June.

[https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/220px-Philippe_Poutou_2011-41bba.jpg]

Yesterday evening, the far-left party chose the trade unionist who works at Ford Blanquefort to represent it in 2012. Philippe Poutou was elected with 53 per cent of the votes.

“Calm and a hard worker”

A trade unionist, member of the CGT, this father of two children, who lives in Bordeaux, has been in all the battles to save jobs in his factory, which was due to close and which finally continues to operate. “He is a calm person, a hard worker, who thinks very quickly and thinks his ideas through to the end”, says Gilles Penel, one of his CGT colleagues at Ford. “We have seldom seen him lose heart during these difficult years”, testifies also Francis Wilsius, CFTC activist and representative on the enterprise committee for several years.

“I will not try and be a super-Besancenot. I will be never as good as him. I will really need the help of my colleagues and friends to succeed”, the activist considers. Irony of history, he is the son of a postman, his three brothers and sisters are also postal workers. “As for me, I failed the entrance exam.”

Without any diploma, doing temporary work for ten years in small storage companies, before starting, again on a temporary contract, in the gear-box section of the Ford plant in 1996, Philippe Poutou came in contact with politics at a very young age.

He was born in Seine-Saint-Denis, but arrived in Gironde at the age of seven, and grew up in a family of Mitterrand supporters – something that he questioned as a teenager. He joined the far left when he was

18. For ten years, he was active in Lutte Ouvriere (LO). He read a lot. Marx and Engels, but also Zola, Hugo, Pouillat, Jaurès. “It was the history of human society through novels that interested me the most”, he explains.

He left LO. After a disagreement with Arlette Laguiller, the local branch was expelled from the party. The Bordeaux members then formed “The Workers’ Voice”, before joining the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR) in 2000. Within the NPA, some people reproach Philippe Poutou with this too “workerist” approach. “We don’t all have the same way of seeing things. Personalization around the candidate doesn’t go down well in the party. In any case we will run the campaign in a collective way”, he replies.

Philippe Poutou is articulate. And also self-assured. Having got used to dealing with the media in the battle for Ford, he is also used to election campaigns. He has stood several times under the banner of the LCR then the NPA, in municipal legislative and European elections. In March 2010, heading the list for the regional elections in Aquitaine, he got 2.52 per cent of the votes.

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Laurie Bosdecher for *Sud-Ouest*