

France : "The pension reform is a typically right-wing measure"

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The new political season is looking complicated for the New Anticapitalist Party (NPA), which is concluding today, Wednesday, August 28, its summer university in Port-Leucate (Aude). Two weeks after launching a national financial appeal, the party has raised only 4,000 euros. But its presidential candidate in 2002 and 2007, Olivier Besancenot, remains confident. « We have started a new life after a difficult period, » he says. Besancenot was interviewed by Raphaëlle Besse Desmoulières for Le Monde.

Raphaëlle Besse Desmoulières : What do you think of the pension reform that has just been announced by Prime Minister Jean- Marc Ayrault ?

Olivier Besancenot - By Tuesday morning we knew we had to fear the worst. We saw Gattaz (president of the MEDEF employers' federation) leaving the Prime Minister's office, looking delighted ! And we were not mistaken. Once again, it is the purchasing power of workers that is affected, with rising contributions and a lengthening of the period of payments necessary to receive a full pension, to 43 years from 2035. But the worst is the government's promise to the MEDEF, of a future reform in 2014 of the financing of social protection, which could represent savings for employers of up to 34 billion euros in the contributions they make for family allowances. This is an unprecedented attack that deserves an unprecedented response. How is it possible to mobilize around a minimal reform, even though the unions do not seem to be very much on the offensive ?

There is anger, even if the government underestimates it completely. The supposedly "left" government is preparing to enact a typically right-wing reform. This is a first. The challenge is for the whole of the social and political non-governmental left to take part in a large-scale mobilization. Unlike in 2010, there will be a divided trade-union front. The consequence of this is that we have to decide whether or not we will sink into an attitude of resignation. Everything is possible on the issue of pensions. In 1995, which saw the first major revolt against the Juppé plan on social security, and which won a victory, the union front was also divided.

What is your assessment of the first year of the Left in power ?

It is absolutely dramatic. It is strongly in continuity with the previous policies. Even on social issues, there is less and less of a difference between the Left and the Right. I am thinking of the whole policy on law and order and immigration. For us, Interior Minister Manuel Valls is absolutely not a loose cannon. He has been mandated to organize a diversion. The government is taking the responsibility of playing on the dangerous ground of the terrible equation between law and order and immigration, opening up a series of false debates, while it prepares to take part in organizing social regression.

Is the NPA in favour of intervention in Syria ?

We are opposed to any Western military intervention in Syria and elsewhere. The revolutionary processes that are underway can be subject to being hijacked by the counter-revolution. Our

solidarity goes first to the Syrian people, in the face of the ongoing slaughter. For months we have been demonstrating with others to demand concrete political and economic solidarity. And also, why not, if the Western powers stop their hypocrisy, arm the Syrian revolutionaries ?

The NPA has launched a subscription for a million euro. Is your party in danger ?

We are not in the red ; we have the money to continue our activities. The only question that arises is whether or not we are able to stand in all the constituencies for the European elections, so as to defend our political project against today's Europe , a Europe of austerity that is organizing social regression, and for a clearly internationalist policy that does not slip into chauvinism . Mélenchon renewed, on Sunday, August 25, his invitation to you to join the Left Front. What is your answer to him ?

The question does not arise in terms of joining the Left Front. What we hope is that the leadership of the Left Front looks a bit less in the direction of the government Left and instead seeks to respond to the call for unity that we have been making for months, in order to form an opposition that is uninhibited and consistent. That implies clashing with the government on the issue of pensions and rejecting, in the municipal elections, all sorts of doubtful alliances.

For the municipal elections, what is your strategy ?

On the basis of an anti-capitalist municipal project, we want to regroup the lists that express policies that are opposed to the government Left. This means having NPA lists in a maximum number of places, as well as united lists with some other local groups, sometimes with the Left Front. For the moment, Lutte Ouvrière says it is inclining towards presenting its own lists. It's up to them to decide.

The former NPA presidential candidate Philippe Poutou says you will both be candidates for the European elections. What is the situation ?

We take things in the right order. We will not make ourselves ridiculous by discussing that, while we have not yet reached our objective for the financial appeal. Talking about it when we are not sure of being able to stand everywhere doesn't make much sense.

P.-S.

* This interview was published in the daily Le Monde on August 28, 2013.