

# France's Lutte Ouvrière demobilizes worker opposition to NATO-Russia war danger

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The Russian invasion of Ukraine and the NATO powers' aggressive strategy threaten the world with a catastrophic world war. The French press is discussing the effects of nuclear bombing of Paris while broadcasting wall-to-wall anti-Russian propaganda. This crisis directly poses the question of the role and character of the petty-bourgeois parties that French media describes as "far left," such as the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) and Lutte ouvrière (LO, Workers Party).

The opposition of masses of workers to NATO military involvement in this war is overwhelming. Last week, 69 percent of Americans opposed a US intervention according to a Rasmussen poll, and 70 per cent of French people oppose French intervention according to a CNews poll. The NPA and LO, however, seek to channel this opposition behind the pro-capitalist trade unions, which support NATO warmongering, and thus to block a struggle against the danger of a world war.

The NPA, which supported NATO intervention in Libya and Syria against pro-Russian regimes, calls to widen the conflict. It advocates "the delivery of defensive weapons without any conditions" by NATO, while demonizing Russia and Putin. Russia is, for the NPA, the world's most aggressive country that must be stopped at all cost, according to analyses it has published by Professor Gilbert Achcar, who also serves as a paid adviser to the British Army. Indeed, Achcar insists:

The fate of the Russian invasion of Ukraine will determine the propensity to aggression of all other countries. If it fails, the effect on all the world and regional powers will be of a strong deterrence. If it succeeds, that is to say, if Russia manages to 'pacify' Ukraine under its jackboots, the effect will be that of a major slide in the world situation towards the law of the jungle.

While superficially LO seems to play a different role, it is oriented towards different layers of the same union bureaucracy and capitalist state machine to which the NPA is attached. Like the NPA, LO managed to obtain millions of votes for its election candidates thanks to media coverage in the early

2000s. But it limits itself to certain criticisms of French foreign policy, without mobilizing its voters against war, while collaborating with openly pro-war parties like the NPA.

On France 5 television, LO's presidential candidate, Nathalie Arthaud, complained that the NATO powers strengthened their positions around Russia and risked provoking a war.

She stated that "a war for influence has lasted for years" in the region, and accused NATO of being principally responsible: "We must condemn the manoeuvres carried out by western imperialist powers, by NATO and of course the United States, because today we are told, of course that Putin is the aggressor. The reality is that a war for influence has lasted years. It is this military pressure in the region since 2014 that is degenerating today into armed conflict."

Arthaud pointed to "NATO's surrounding of Russia, which has put military pressure on Russia and finally led to this armed confrontation. Of course, I condemn these rivalries, this power struggle."

She added: "This relation of forces, this power struggle exists for many years and I have the impression that we are witnessing a sort of gross manipulation which resembles what happened in Iraq in 2003. We were told that Saddam Hussein was a monster and that he sought to explode the planet. Furthermore, the Americans invented the weapons of mass destruction in Iraq in order to launch the war and invade it."

On the war launched by Moscow, Arthaud said: "I don't have any sympathy for Putin's regime. Of course I think this war must be stopped, the first victim is the population. But we must put our own house in order, faced with the responsibility of the western powers, of France which is aligned in reality with the United States."

As regards NATO's aggressive role in the region in recent decades, and the reactionary role of Putin, Arthaud's remarks are fairly accurate. She was also able to counter certain traps laid for her by the France 5 interviewer, who pressed her to adopt the NPA's warmongering pro-NATO position on the war.

When her questioner objected, "but it is not NATO which is waging war," Arthaud replied: "But yes, NATO is waging war. ... Do you know how many weapons the Americans have sent to Poland, Romania, Ukraine also? There have never been so

many military bases surrounding Russia.”

In fact, Washington and its European allies interpreted the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 as the occasion to try to impose their unchallenged domination of the planet. Since then, the interventions led by imperialism have devastated Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria. NATO is currently carrying out a vast rearmament programme targeting Russia. Having surrounded Russia with military bases and refused Moscow’s calls for guarantees concerning its security, NATO attempted, with success, to provoke a Russian invasion of Ukraine.

But LO is not concerned to mobilise workers against the danger of war which flows from the policies of all the major powers, and above all the imperialist powers. Like the rest of the petty-bourgeois pseudo-left milieu that emerged from the 1968 middle class student movement, LO aims rather to block an international anti-war movement in the working class.

Although it obtained millions of votes in elections and has several thousand members, this party makes no call for a mobilisation against war.

In fact, LO attempts simply to reinforce the trade union apparatus in every country. This policy was clearly expressed at a meeting last month by Jean-Pierre Mercier, the leading union delegate for the Stalinist General Confederation of Labor (CGT) union at the Stellantis (PSA) automobile firm and spokesman for Nathalie Arthaud in the 2022 presidential campaign.

Whilst admitting that the “unions have played the role of a transmission belt in the working class” for the ruling class, Mercier claimed that the first duty of a revolutionary is to participate in the union bureaucracy: “They must be the most active elements, the most determined, the most militant! Revolutionary communists must be there where the workers are, fighting by their side and seeking to organize those who are not union members: that is the basic starting point for the work of a communist militant.”

First of all, this argument is false, because workers are no longer in unions in France and in ever broader parts of the world. The percentage of workers who are trade union members in France is around 7 percent. Masses of workers distrust the trade union bureaucracy, as was seen in the movement of the “yellow vests” which was organized independently of the unions on social media.

Moreover, and above all, the strategy of LO of channeling workers behind the national trade union bureaucracies divides the working class and prevents a common struggle against war. It only took a few days for the hypocritical criticisms of LO regarding NATO to be exposed. Indeed, the unions promoted by LO are joining the imperialist powers to support the campaign for a NATO military intervention against Russia.

On March 9, the CGT union, of which Mercier is a top official, published a declaration denouncing Russia as an aggressor and demanding that the NATO powers severely punish it. It asserts that only the defeat of Russia by NATO and

the fall of the Putin regime will be enough to reestablish peace and prevent a world war.

“The return to peace takes place through the fall of Putin,” writes the CGT, adding: “A lasting peace can only be obtained by his departure and this will only come about through the convergence of three factors: strong and really effective international sanctions, a hopefully victorious Ukrainian resistance; and support for the democratic and progressive Russian opposition.”

The CGT is pleased that severe economic sanctions can destroy living standards of masses of workers in Russia, but also internationally due to the devastating sanctions imposed on Russian exports of oil and grain. The CGT also whitewashes the role of the extreme-right Ukrainian forces that the CGT hopes will be victorious thanks to NATO support against Moscow. These declarations confirm that the CGT bureaucracy, like LO, represent the interests of affluent layers of the middle classes who consciously support imperialism.

Against the passivity of LO, the Parti de l’égalité socialiste, (PES, Socialist Equality Party), the French section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), calls to build an anti-war movement in the working class, independent of the union bureaucracy and its defenders in the pseudo-left parties.

This perspective for building an international anti-war movement in the working class separates the PES and the ICFI, the world Trotskyist movement, from the middle-class tendencies represented by the NPA and LO. To fight the growing danger of a Third World War, the urgent question is to build the International Workers Alliance of Rank and File Committees in opposition to the union bureaucracies, and the PES in opposition to LO.



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