

Daniel Bensaïd - Interview

Foundation of the NPA (France)

“We need to create a common culture”

Vicki Morris and Ed Maltby: *Six months from now, how will you measure the success of the New Anti-capitalist Party?*

Daniel Bensaïd: Well, I don't want to make any predictions about the social movement, what it will be like in six months time. For us, we need to consolidate the fusion, on the cultural, educational and political levels. We have different cultures inside the NPA, and we need to work together to consolidate. We need a better effort of education, and to create a common culture.

We need to make sure that what results is pluralism, which is necessary, and not eclecticism.

We have a big challenge of educational training inside the NPA. We need new pedagogical methods. The LCR had very developed intellectual training, and many people with university education. Now we have more militants who haven't necessarily had that.

For example, if we want to teach about the Spanish civil war, we might be able to use things like the Ken Loach film to help people understand. We need to make more use of audio-visual material, the internet, and so on.

To illustrate this diversity, we have immigrants with their own national history. We have people from an Algerian background who will know more about the fight for Algerian independence than about the history of the Popular Front in France in the 1930s.

We have to create a common history and culture, and find new ways to work together.

V.M. and E.M.: *In the programme of the NPA it says that you aim to achieve “a government at the service of the workers?” What do you mean by that? Isn't it ambiguous? Does it mean a revolutionary government, or a government that is not directly revolutionary but that has been voted in with and is based on mass working-class support?*

D.B.: Well, we mean a government that is as loyal to our class as ruling-class governments are to theirs. But right now we are not a party of government. It's a speculative formula. The question of government will be posed one day, but we are not there now, there is no point posing the problem now. At the moment, we need to change the balance of class forces in our favour. In order to convince people of that idea you can live with propagandistic ambiguity. The balance of forces can change. That's the problem with Trotskyists, they think too much about these sorts of things! We are trying to simplify our lives.

V.M. and E.M.: *At whom does NPA direct its demands?*

D.B.: At everyone. At Sarkozy. We are asking for an across-the-board rise in wages of 300 euros: it doesn't matter who from. Whatever government you have. That's how to create a political reality.

V.M. and E.M.: *What is NPA policy toward the trade unions? Do you try to make them grow?*

D.B.: It's an important issue. You have to ask yourselves why they have shrunk in the first place. The creation of SUD [group of class struggle trade unions] has changed things, but SUD is still small. There is an important tradition of radical/revolutionary trade unions in France. The CGT [largest trade union federation] is less subordinated to the Commu-

nist Party than it was. We are working inside SUD, CGT and the FSU [the largest teachers' union].

V.M. and E.M.: *What are the biggest dangers in this period? What mistakes could the NPA make now?*

D.B.: The biggest mistake we could make – but I don't think we are going to – is to try to get close to the 'left' of the Socialist Party. That's unlikely to happen because the NPA right now is very “leftist”, in a positive sense. We have confidence in ourselves and don't want to go into alliances like that. The Socialist Party is not a factor in the lives of working-class people. As we get bigger we might have to think more about how we relate to them politically.

Might we become victims of our own success? Olivier Besancenot is immensely popular and is in the media a lot: this can give you a distorted view. We have to have a clear idea of the real balance of forces in the country. We are on 10 percent in the opinion polls for the European elections in June, but I don't think we will get that. We have to keep our feet on the ground and we can do that. But while the media is interested we can use it.

We have nine thousand members. That's good, but the Communist Party has 40 thousand members. Measured by their activity, I say that one NPA militant is worth two CP militants, but we shouldn't get an inflated sense of our own importance.

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