

French Socialist Party publishes right-wing election programme

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In the midst of an escalating crisis of the Gaullist government of President Jacques Chirac and Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin, the French Socialist Party has issued its draft programme for the 2007 presidential and legislative elections.

With the Gaullists rocked by mass protests and the Chirac-Villepin government stumbling from one scandal to the next, the Socialist Party is presenting itself as a loyal defender of the interests of big business. The election document aims to demonstrate that the interests of French imperialism will be in reliable hands should the Socialist Party provide the next president and head the next government.

Under a thin gloss of rhetorical commitments to “combat inequality, redistribute wealth, preserve ecological equilibriums, in a word, transform society,” the draft programme puts forward a neo-colonialist and militaristic foreign policy in response to escalating international tensions, and calls for intensified state repression at home in response to growing resistance by the working class to the attacks on its rights and living conditions.

The document is being discussed in local party branches, to be voted on by the membership and at a party convention on July 1. The convention will also select candidates for the National Assembly elections.

The Socialist Party has not yet decided on its candidate for the presidential election and there are a number of contenders. The draft programme issued by the top leadership makes clear, however, that whoever is nominated, she or he will stand on a thoroughly right-wing programme.

The leadership is filling the ranks of the party with new, inexperienced and generally middle-class members. While the membership, according to a recent count, stood at 135,000, the party reports a rush of membership applications at reduced fees, submitted through the Internet. These new members will be allowed to vote on the draft programme.

The most prominent feature of the document is its unrestrained nationalism. It declares, for example, “France is a great country proud of its universal message.... French men and women do not spurn excellence and competitiveness...”

The social and economic crisis gripping the country is defined exclusively from the standpoint of big business. The programme emphasises that France suffers from “a steep decline in our competitiveness and ... a worrisome level of public debt.” The Socialist Party’s answer to these problems is, in substance, no different from that of every major bourgeois party in Europe: “We want to combine economic growth to bring prosperity and the redistribution of wealth, with a sense of responsibility towards future generations.”

These words have a definite meaning. “Economic growth” and “prosperity” are catchwords for “free market” policies and attacks on working conditions and wages; “responsibility towards future generations” is a euphemism for cuts in social spending. The allusion to redistribution of wealth is included to deceive working class voters.

Given its concentration on the “greatness” of France and its concern for

French business, it is not surprising that the document does not even pay lip service to the fate of workers around the world, who are experiencing impoverishment and social deprivation at the hands of the transnational corporations and the governments subservient to them.

Instead, the Socialist Party seeks to compete with Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy, the likely Gaullist contender for the presidency, by launching an ideological offensive against immigrants. While some Socialist Party leaders participated in demonstrations this past spring against Sarkozy’s immigration law, the draft programme puts forward a vigorous anti-immigration policy. “We will carry out a policy of firmness towards illegal immigration,” the document declares, and calls for increased resources for the work inspectorate and harsher penalties for employers who hire undocumented workers.

It pledges to continue the present policy of persuading countries of origin to take back immigrants expelled from France, and for transit countries to cooperate in barring their way. In practice, this means the deaths of thousands fleeing poverty and oppression, particularly African boat people.

“We will conduct an individualised policy for the successful integration of immigrants,” party leader François Hollande explained on the “Ca se discute” TV programme. The Socialist Party would not legalise immigrants en masse, he continued. Rather, it would proceed on a case by case basis, implying heavy police and bureaucratic surveillance of immigrants.

He went on to declare that a Socialist Party government “will initiate a European policy to create a single common police force at the frontiers of the [European] Union.” It would, in other words, pursue a Fortress Europe policy directed against immigrants.

Not long ago the Socialist Party would, at least in words, acknowledge that problems of juvenile delinquency had social roots that had to be addressed. This is no longer the case. Now the party brands as criminality all expressions of unrest among unemployed, largely immigrant youth in impoverished working class suburbs, where police brutality and provocation are facts of daily life. The Socialist Party’s answer to “youth crime” is naked repression.

“For the Socialists, law and order is an essential priority,” proclaims the draft programme. Mimicking British Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair’s “tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime” rhetoric, the document declares: “We will carry out a policy of firmness against delinquency and against its causes.”

It proposes a build-up of community policing, and demands that family welfare payments to parents of delinquent children be administered by appointees of the courts, who would have the power to decide how the money was spent. This idea was first advanced by Ségolène Royal, who is seeking the Socialist Party’s nomination for president. She also proposed that unruly youth be placed under the control of the military.

The draft programme, while not endorsing the latter proposal, points in the same direction. It calls for the construction of more “classes-relais”

(boarding facilities for disruptive pupils), and advocates “a continuity of action based on early prevention and punishment.”

The program calls for greater cooperation between the social services and the police, and various initiatives—“education centres,” “apprenticeship workshops,” “punishments involving community work”—to facilitate a “pacified relationship between the youth and the police.”

Unable to provide an answer to the high level of youth unemployment, the Socialist Party proposes a form of forced labour for *all* youth between the ages of 18 and 25. It wants to establish a six-month “civic service,” obligatory for everyone in this age group.

For some 20 years, France has had a youth unemployment rate between 20 and 25 percent. Instead of providing stable, decently paid employment and adequate housing, so that young working class adults are able to establish themselves and provide for a family, the Socialist Party wants to drag them into obligatory work.

The “civic service” would involve “services of collective utility to the Nation” and “create a sentiment of belonging and identity.” It might include a military service, or, as the programme puts it, “a defence element in the obligatory civic service for all youth under 25.”

Notably absent is any mention of the anti-terrorism law of Interior Minister Sarkozy, and therefore no pledge to repeal it. When, on December 9, 2005, the National Assembly adopted the bill, the Socialist Party deputies abstained.

The law sanctions sweeping attacks on civil liberties. It empowers the state to monitor all telephone and Internet communications and obliges telecommunications companies and Internet providers to facilitate such state spying. The power of the *préfets*, the regional representatives of the minister of the interior, is expanded to enable them to install closed-circuit cameras on public buildings, including places of worship such as mosques.

These police-state measures have provoked no controversy within the leadership of the Socialist Party.

The need to inculcate in the youth a nationalistic and chauvinistic outlook flows from the foreign and military policy aims outlined in the draft programme.

A section entitled “Make France Successful in Europe and the World” begins with the sentence: “France has a major part to play in the world, but today her influence is regressing.” The programme highlights “the emergence with China and India of political and economic great powers in Asia” and speaks of “present and future conflicts for energy,” “the existence of global terrorism” and “sharp contradictions of the American hyper-power.”

The document is silent on the military and logistic support given by the French government to the US and its allies in the occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq, thereby signalling the Socialist Party’s consent.

The Socialist Party has a long history of active support for French colonialism, going back to the Algerian war and beyond. As under the presidency of François Mitterrand (1981-1995), the Socialist Party is anxious to defend the interests of French imperialism in Africa and throughout the world. Because France on its own is militarily too weak to compete with the United States for the resources of the planet, the Socialist Party relies on European alliances.

The programme urges independence from US-dominated NATO, declaring: “France’s defence policy involves *a resolute participation in a European security and defence policy with strong cooperation with different countries....* This constitutes a more promising perspective for the future than NATO. It must lead to a normalisation of our military relations with the African countries, taking account of two imperatives: *European partnership, the will of the African peoples*” (emphasis in the original).

Laurent Fabius, former Socialist prime minister (1984-1986), spoke recently of combining the French and German armies. The draft

programme puts forward “the setting up of an arms agency, [for which] the France/Germany/Great Britain triangle can be the driving force.”

Stressing that “*disarmament is out of the question*,” the Socialist Party programme insists that France must have nuclear weapons: “*Nuclear deterrence must remain part of the logic of forbidding aggression against ourselves and our EU partners*” (emphasis in the original). Here, the Socialist Party shows its desire to give French imperialism an advantage in Europe through her membership in the nuclear club.

The fraudulent nature of the programme’s meagre and vague promises of social reforms is exemplified by the proposal to retain the right to retire at 60, while omitting to state the level of workers’ contributions or the value of their pensions, merely suggesting “broad negotiations.”

The issue is a crucial one for the Socialist Party. In 2002, at the meeting of European Union (EU) heads of state in Barcelona, shortly before that year’s presidential election, President Chirac and then-Socialist Party Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, in line with the Lisbon Agenda, supported the policy of reducing pension rights and raising the retirement age. This attack on the working class was a major factor in Jospin’s subsequent election defeat.

“Broad negotiations” can only mean that a Socialist Party-led government will devise, in collaboration with the trade unions and employers’ organisations, a means of diminishing the cost of pension provision. The Socialist Party leaders know full well that they are all fully signed up to the Lisbon Agenda, whose purpose is to make the EU “the most competitive economy in the world,” and that any new law will mean longer work lives, greater contributions by workers from their salaries, and smaller pensions for retirees.

The draft programme, in line with EU practice, proposes the setting up of an “Annual National Tripartite Conference” involving the government, employers and trade unions, “whose objective will be to discuss orientations and proposals in terms of salary policy...”

The draft programme claims the objective of “attaining full employment by 2012,” and lists standard nostrums such as cheap-labour schemes and tax incentives for employers which have failed for over 20 years to bring unemployment rates appreciably below 10 percent.

Only two days after the drafting of the programme, Hollande, the first secretary of the Socialist Party, was telling TV viewers on the programme “Ca se discute” that the aim was, in fact, less ambitious: to bring unemployment down to 5 percent. He made it clear there would be no legislation prohibiting sackings, but that prospering firms shedding labour in order to increase profits might face penalties. Questioned as to what a Socialist Party government would do for a 56-year-old jobless person, Hollande was at a loss for an answer, and merely commiserated with the questioner.

The cynicism of the social reform promises in the programme is evident from the fact that no proposals are costed in any detail.

Lionel Stoleru, former secretary of state for planning under Socialist Party Prime Minister Michel Rocard (1988-1991), in an opinion piece in *Le Monde* on June 10, said that if a left government were elected “everyone knows” it would be “out of the question” that they would have the means “to carry out their election promises.”

He continued: “The left, as well as the right, will have to govern in a market economy, unless they leave the European Union, close the frontiers, nationalise businesses.... No one will do that. It is not true that the left will renationalise EDF [the national electricity company] after 2007; it is not true that they will repeal the pension law.”

A June 16 *Le Figaro* article makes clear that the hopefuls for the Socialist Party presidential nomination have been quick to release themselves from the meagre pledges made in the document they just unanimously approved: “Dominique Strauss-Khan wants to ‘make a selection’ from the proposals, Jack Lang says they are ‘insufficient,’ Ségolène Royal repeats that she retains her ‘freedom of speech’.... ‘The

affordable housing programme seems very costly, we'll have to look into its social effectiveness,' people are saying, for example, in the circles around presidential hopefuls."

Strauss-Khan, on the re-nationalisation of EDF, states, "There will doubtless be greater priorities than that." Ségolène Royal "has not completely given up her idea of military supervision [of delinquent youth]: she is pleased to go on saying we shouldn't be ashamed of the uniformed professions."

It is significant that the Communist Party, hoping for an electoral and government alliance with the Socialist Party, has issued no critique of the draft programme. In an article published on June 9, the CP daily *l'Humanité* merely listed all the "positive" elements, without exposing the fraudulent nature of the programme's promises.

Rouge, the newspaper of the "far left" Ligue communiste révolutionnaire (LCR), and *Lutte ouvrière*, while criticising some of the inadequacies of the social proposals in the draft programme, ignore its antidemocratic dimensions and the militarist and anti-immigrant policies it expounds. Olivier Besancenot, spokesperson for the LCR, while ruling out at present an electoral alliance with the Socialist Party, assured Hollande that "There are loads of things we can do together."



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