

French presidential elections

Royal moves into the camp of Bayrou

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Ségolène Royal, the presidential candidate of the French Socialist Party, has reacted to the April 22 election by throwing herself into the arms of François Bayrou, the candidate of the right-wing bourgeois UDF. Bayrou took third place in the first round of the presidential election with 18.6 percent of the vote, trailing Royal (25.9 percent) and the Gaullist Nicolas Sarkozy (31.2 percent).

Royal offered Bayrou a public television debate and indicated that his party would receive ministerial posts should she win the final round of voting on May 6. Both of her suggestions amount to the formation of an alliance with Bayrou's party, which has been a permanent fixture of right-wing bourgeois politics in France since its foundation 30 years ago by Valéry Giscard d'Estaing.

A public debate with a candidate who was defeated in the first round and is not on the ballot for the second would be unprecedented in French politics. Royal is offering Bayrou a platform to propagate his right-wing views in order to better incorporate them into her own campaign.

Bayrou, who calls himself a politician of the centre, stands for a tight budget policy, an end to state intervention in the economy and a lowering of labour costs. As education minister in the 1990s, this practicing Catholic unleashed a storm of protest when he sought to introduce the financing of religious and private schools with public funds.

Bayrou intends to create a new "Democratic Party" before the national parliamentary elections set for June. The party's name is taken from the American Democrats, as well as the organisation presently being formed in Italy by uniting the Margherita alliance with the Left Democrats (the successor to the Italian Communist Party). Bayrou maintains close relations with Francesco Rutelli, the leader of Margherita.

The purpose of the new Italian Democratic Party is to provide a stable parliamentary base for Romano Prodi, the head of the Italian government. The Left Democrats are making available their party apparatus and their remaining influence, while Margherita provides the political leadership—comprising mainly conservative career politicians who lost any credibility or popular support long ago.

A similar project is now underway in France. Royal's offer to Bayrou is more than just a tactical move designed to win more

votes. It marks the end of the "union de la gauche," the "unity of the left," which lay at the heart of the SP's electoral strategy since the reestablishment of the party in Epinay in 1971. Its most important ally then had been the Communist Party (CPF), which still had considerable influence in the 1970s. Later allies were the Greens, Jean Pierre Chevènement's Citizen's Movement and the Radical Left Party, which together with the Socialist and Communist Parties formed the "plural left" coalition government led by Lionel Jospin.

The various "left" governments that have administered France since the 1980s never represented the interests of the working class. From 1982 onwards—just one year after his election as president—François Mitterrand ditched all the reformist promises he had made during his election campaign and pursued a right-wing agenda in the interests of big business. The same course was followed by the government of Lionel Jospin.

The parties of the "plural left" have largely discredited themselves through their right-wing policies. The Communist Party, in particular, has suffered a defeat of historic proportions. Its candidate, Marie George Buffet, received less than 2 percent of the vote in the recent election. The Green candidate Dominique Voynet received 1.6 percent, while the Citizen's Movement and the Radicals Left did not even put up candidates.

Now, Royal thinks the time is right for an open pact with the right wing. She has largely assumed both their rhetoric and programme. On Thursday, she announced on the national television channel TF1 that she is aiming for a "presidential majority," which overcomes "the eternal confrontation of block against block." The reconciliation of left and right had been at the centre of Bayrou's election programme.

She has also taken over a key demand made in Bayrou's programme: financial relief for businesses in the form of exempting them from social security contributions for two of their employees—a measure aimed at helping smaller enterprises. In the same television programme, she emphatically supported the "Gaullist doctrine" of nuclear sovereignty.

Royal's overtures to Bayrou make an absolute mockery of all those who have argued that she represents a serious alternative

to Nicolas Sarkozy, the right-wing candidate of the Gaullist UMP. Royal's current right-wing campaign not only repels broad layers of voters seeking an answer to the social crisis, it strengthens the position of Sarkozy. It will also form the basis of her government's policies should she be elected.

In its analysis of Royal's cuddling up to Bayrou, the newspaper *Libération* comments: "By going for the centre, Royal is geared on a strategic level to the coalition in Italy led by Romano Prodi and on a more fundamental level to the ideological renewal carried out by Tony Blair in Great Britain." That is undoubtedly true. One could also add to this list the former German social democratic chancellor, Gerhard Schröder.

From the point of view of the ruling class, such social democratic or "socialist"-led governments have been much more effective in cutting budgets and attacking social rights than right-wing governments, which are internally divided or dominated by the interests of disparate cliques. Unparalleled cuts in wages and social rights have taken place, particularly in Germany during the seven years of the Schröder government.

The working class today is incapable of defending a single social gain without breaking from the Socialist Party and its "left-wing" appendages. Many workers and young people will cast their votes for Royal because they want to stop Sarkozy, but this will do nothing to resolve the social and political crisis. A Royal presidency will only differ in nuances from a Sarkozy presidency.

It is left to the petty-bourgeois radicals to present Royal as "the lesser evil" and help run her election campaign under the slogan "Anybody but Sarkozy." The Revolutionary Communist League (Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire, LCR), Worker's Struggle (Lutte Ouvrière) and the Communist Party have expressed their regret at Royal's shift towards Bayrou, but continue nevertheless to call for a vote for her in the second round.

Alain Krivine of the LCR declared that Royal's offers to Bayrou were "a very bad idea, which run the risk of demobilising the left," but quickly added: "We have clearly said that the second round will be a referendum for or against Sarkozy. We vote against Sarkozy, and the only means to do this is a vote for Ségolène."

Lutte Ouvrière declared it was "not surprised" by Royal's suggestions, but persisted with their call for a vote for Royal in order to "keep Sarkozy in check."

The CPF is also continuing to call for support for Royal, in order to "beat Sarkozy." It is even preparing to participate in an election meeting for Royal in Paris next week, together with prominent socialists and the Greens. The Green Noël Mamère justified his readiness to participate in such an event with the words: "The house is burning in view of a coalition between Sarkozy and Le Pen. This is not the time therefore to ask questions. When we are invited to meetings, we have to go...."

Royal's approach to Bayrou initially received a favourable

reaction inside the Socialist Party. This changed, however, when at an election meeting in Montpellier on Wednesday, Royal promised Bayrou participation in her government. Another speaker at this meeting was the Green Party European deputy Daniel Cohn-Bendit, who has long argued for an alliance between the socialists, the UDF and the Greens.

This announcement provoked fear among some Socialist Party functionaries about losing their positions and privileges. Due to the French first-past-the-post electoral law, not only ministerial positions and seats in the national parliament depend on agreements between the parties, but tens of thousands of posts in regional and municipal authorities as well. An alliance between the Socialist Party and the UDF could cost many SP functionaries their jobs.

Royal's offer to accept UDF ministers in a future government was therefore a source of strife in the Socialist Party. The newspaper *Libération* quotes a prominent SP functionary: "To turn to Bayrou's voters is one thing, quite another when one puts oneself into his hands." Even the chairman of the party and Royal's companion, François Hollande, felt required to dissociate himself discreetly from Royal's proposal.

Royal immediately made it clear that she will not yield to pressure from her party. "I am a practical woman, a woman who adapts to circumstances," she told the television programme *France 2*. "I stand above the parties, because I must win the support of every second French citizen."

On Wednesday, and in front of a camera team called specially for the occasion, she had an ostentatious breakfast on the terrace of a Paris restaurant with Dominique Strauss-Kahn. The former finance minister has long been a proponent of a coalition with the right wing and is seen as a possible prime minister under Royal.

There can be no doubt that the Socialist Party, which once loyally adapted to the right-wing agenda of Mitterrand, will also faithfully follow Royal's new course, so long as they are guaranteed their posts and careers.



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