

France: Sarkozy wins vote on EU treaty with help of Socialist Party

Pierre Mabut
16 February 2008

President Nicolas Sarkozy has finally succeeded in imposing the Lisbon Treaty on the French population, with critical assistance from the Socialist Party. The treaty was approved by the National Assembly on February 7 by a vote of 336 to 52. A majority of Socialist Party deputies voted in favour or were absent from the vote.

The treaty is a revised version of the European Constitution, which was decisively rejected by French and Dutch voters in popular referendums in 2005 because it embodied the free-market economics required by European capitalism.

Although the Socialist Party (SP) and its ally in the National Assembly, the French Communist Party (PCF), did not have enough members to vote down the treaty, three days earlier they had the opportunity to require the government to put the issue before the French people in another referendum before it could be ratified by parliament.

The acceptance of the treaty necessitated a modification of the French constitution, which requires a three-fifths majority vote of the Congress (the joint meeting of the National Assembly and the Senate at the Palace of Versailles), the only body empowered to change the constitution. The modification allowed the EU Treaty to be adopted without a referendum. While the SP, along with the PCF, did have the two-fifths representation that would have enabled them to prevent the constitutional change, they chose not to do so.

The ruling elites of France and Europe feared that the French working class, in opposition to Sarkozy's dismantling of the welfare state and attacks on living standards and democratic rights, would again scupper their plans. By allowing Sarkozy to push through the Lisbon Treaty, the SP has effectively given the go-ahead to the government to carry forward its vast

programme of "reforms."

Sarkozy appeared on television February 10 to express his relief that "a simplified treaty...was a solution that allowed partisans and opponents of the [European] constitution to surmount their differences." In fact, the constitution and the Lisbon Treaty are essentially identical. The architect of the constitution, former French president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, has already described the Lisbon Treaty as a "near perfect copy of the 2005 treaty."

In his televised speech, Sarkozy justified his decision to block a second referendum by citing the antidemocratic positions of the other European governments. He stated, "To convince all our partners to accept this new simplified treaty that we proposed, and which was no longer a constitution, in the event of agreement we had to commit ourselves to obtain its approval through parliamentary channels. If this condition had not been met, no agreement would have been possible."

In nationalistic terms, he tried to present the treaty as a concession to the "malaise" felt by French people, protecting them from free-market competition. "We got to the point where Europe no longer expressed a collective will," Sarkozy said, "where there were no more debates, which are the life of great democracies, where our companies—confronted with unfair competition—were not adequately defended, while everyone else did just that."

The Socialist Party has played a pernicious role in supporting Sarkozy's UMP (Union for a Popular Movement) governing party on the treaty. It has worked systematically to overturn the 2005 referendum vote and has slavishly supported Sarkozy's European policy as a step in the right direction. One hundred twenty-one SP deputies in the National Assembly voted

for the new treaty on February 7.

Pierre Moscovici, a leading SP spokesman on foreign policy, argued: “A majority of us are going to ratify this treaty in spite of its deficiencies, its delays, its exemptions, its lack of ambition, while being conscious that this treaty is not the end of Europe’s history.”

The Socialists went into contortions over what to do at the Congress meeting that changed the constitution. The SP leadership first decided to boycott the excursion to Versailles. But after a meeting of SP deputies in the National Assembly, its spokesman Jean-Marc Ayrault made an about-turn, stating that his members would be present, but would abstain on the vote.

These manoeuvres on the part of the SP were born of fear that Sarkozy might lose the vote and the interests of French imperialism in Europe would be endangered. “Some people think if we reject the changes to the constitution a referendum [on the Lisbon Treaty] would be provoked,” Ayrault said. “That is untrue. It would provoke a profound crisis leading to nothing. The Lisbon Treaty would no longer be subject to ratification.... The SP will not take responsibility for provoking a crisis in Europe.”

At Versailles, the SP vote was finally split three ways. Thirty-two SP senators and deputies voted in favour of Sarkozy’s amended French constitution, including well-known right-wing mainstays of the establishment like Jack Lang, Manuel Valls and Robert Badinter; 121 voted against and 143 abstained. This enabled Sarkozy to get his required three-fifths majority. Had all the SP representatives opposed it, the process would have been blocked, precipitating a crisis for the government. This could have created the conditions for a renewed movement of the working class against free-market policies to emerge, something the Socialist Party wants to avoid at all costs.

The SP coming to President Sarkozy’s aid could not have been more opportune. His popularity rating has fallen to its lowest level since taking office, with only 39 percent satisfied with his policies in February, compared to 65 percent last July.

As Sarkozy’s attacks on living standards and democratic rights intensify, the SP is moving further to the right. While the social democrats of the SP have been shoring up Sarkozy’s regime, the radical left—such as Lutte Ouvrière, the Greens and the Stalinists of the PCF—are clinging to the Socialist Party. Their

participation in joint electoral lists with the SP in municipal elections in March serves to blind workers and youth to the real bourgeois nature of the Socialist Party and to politically disenfranchise the working class.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact