

France: Socialist Party, “far left” signal support for right-wing alliance

Kumaran Ira
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Recent declarations by the centre-right MoDem (Democratic Movement) party that it would consider an alliance with the Parti socialiste (PS) signal preparations for a major rightward lurch in French bourgeois politics.

In the run-up to the 2010 regional and 2012 presidential elections, the bourgeoisie finds itself without an obvious alternative to conservative President Nicolas Sarkozy. With MoDem leader François Bayrou’s appeals to the PS, the bourgeoisie is preparing the most right-wing basis for reorganising the fractious French bourgeois left—including not only the PS, but the Parti Communiste Français (PCF) and the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (NPA)—into a viable contender for office.

In his concluding speech at the MoDem’s summer conference on September 4-6 in La Grande-Motte, Bayrou declared that he wanted a dialogue with the opposition to build a credible alternative. He said, “My conviction is that all Frenchmen should understand, through these exchanges, the thoughts of those political families that seek a political alternation.”

He proposed organising a “parliament of alternation,” in which the MoDem and the PS would explore a potential political agreement. Significantly, he did not propose running a common candidate, a move that would place him and the MoDem at a disadvantage compared to the far larger PS. Instead, he left open an independent run for office, after his candidacy had been boosted by public negotiations with the PS, the French bourgeoisie’s long-standing left party of government.

Bayrou said: “Each will come with his ideas, explaining them subject-by-subject, calmly and publicly exposing and confronting agreements and disagreements before the French people. Afterwards, we will know clearly where the convergences and differences, or even the divergences, lie. And when there are divergences, on a major subject, who will decide? It is the French people, that’s what the first round of a great election is for.”

A consensus in favour of cooperation with Bayrou is rapidly developing inside the PS, large sections of which have long sought an explicit alliance with the MoDem. Ségolène Royal, the PS’s defeated 2007 presidential candidate, is a long-standing proponent of such a course of action. She appealed to Bayrou for an endorsement in the second round of the 2007 elections and has since publicly advocated a PS-MoDem alliance.

Following Bayrou’s proposal for dialogue, Royal expressed her willingness to participate in it. She called the proposal “very interesting,” adding: “Alternation is necessarily built with the centrists, I’ve always thought that. This corresponds to a movement of thought in French society. If we want an alternation, that is, to end the current regime which is doing so much damage, we must have a convergence of progressive forces.”

On August 23, Vincent Peillon, a PS member and supporter of Royal, organised a meeting to promote another approach for gathering the PS along with the MoDem, the Greens and the PCF prior to the 2012 presidential election. Ex-PCF chairman Robert Hue was invited to take part in that meeting along with Green party leader Daniel Cohn-Bendit

and leading member of the MoDem, Marielle de Sarnez.

Significantly, even Royal’s factional adversaries inside the PS are increasingly signalling their willingness to consider an alliance with Bayrou. At the PS summer school, PS First Secretary Martine Aubry called on Bayrou to “clarify his position,” asking him if he was ready to join the PS for an “economic, social, and ecological project.” She said that he could “support left lists in the regional elections.”

An emerging right-wing consensus

At a most fundamental level, this proposed alliance is a public admission of what class-conscious workers have long known: the PS’s policies are entirely compatible with those of right-wing figures like Bayrou.

This is not the first time that the PS has been in cooperation with the MoDem. PS’s leader and the mayor of Lille, Martine Aubry, made an alliance with the MoDem in the municipal elections in Lille, where she is mayor, in March 2008. The PS mayor of Dijon, François Rebsamen, made a deal with the MoDem and the PCF in the first round of the 2008 municipal elections. *Le Monde* noted that PS-MoDem alliances are in preparation for the 2010 regional elections in several regions: Provence, Rhône-Alps, Burgundy, Brittany and the Loire Valley.

A national alliance based on public dialogue between the PS and Bayrou would nonetheless mark a political milestone: the abandonment of the PS’s token opposition to the war in Afghanistan (Bayrou supports France’s deployment there) and of any pretensions to a left-wing programme.

Until now, the PS has typically presented itself, in an entirely false manner, as a party advocating limited improvements in the conditions of the working class. President François Mitterrand, who held office from 1981 to 1995, won the 1981 election on a rapidly abandoned platform of nationalisation and social reforms. Prime Minister Lionel Jospin’s government came to power in 1997 with promises of limiting the workweek to 35 hours—though its proposals were so full of loopholes that businesses profited significantly from the measure before Sarkozy dismantled it last year.

Since Jospin’s defeat in the 2002 elections, PS platforms have drifted ever more openly to the right. Royal’s 2007 campaign was marked by appeals to individualism, the free market, patriotism and law-and-order rhetoric in favour of jailing juveniles.

Though associated to opposition in the PS to Royal’s more free-market appeal, Aubry is also trying to prepare the political basis for a shift to the right by the PS. In her *Le Monde* column on August 27, she outlined proposals for a pseudo-ecological Malthusianism, writing: “Post-productivism does not consist in renouncing production, but in defining a

selective growth to produce usefully, soberly, and cleanly. Now, we know that abundance is not synonymous with happiness. The new model demands a profound change in our methods of equipping our cities, of living, or consuming, and moving about.”

In Bayrou, the PS would have an ally with impeccable right-wing credentials. He founded the MoDem—the successor party to the UDF (Union for French Democracy) of former President Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, who was head of state from 1974 to 1981—after the 2007 election. The UDF had always participated in conservative Gaullist governments. A number of ex-UDF members refused to join the MoDem, creating the “New Centre” that is a major partner of the current Sarkozy government.

His most important government position came in 1993-1997, as minister of education in the conservative Gaullist government of Prime Minister Edouard Balladur and Alain Juppé. At that time, he proposed eliminating caps on public subsidies to private schools. Since these are largely Catholic religious schools, Bayrou’s proposals prompted national, pro-secular demonstrations.

Possible external political forms of a PS-Bayrou alliance are also being prepared. There have been repeated calls from figures close to Royal—including PS politician Manuel Valls and author Bernard-Henri Lévy—for the PS to cease calling itself “socialist” and articulate a new political persona for the French bourgeoisie’s left party of government.

At the same time, the PS-linked think tank Terra Nova—which calls itself “progressive,” not socialist—has come to the fore politically. It has organised the PS’s consensus around plans for a presidential primary in 2012, along the model of the Italian primary that brought the right-wing government of Romano Prodi to power in 2006. Terra Nova is also at the forefront of the PS’s collaboration in Sarkozy’s plans for a “national subscription” that would oversee a massive handout of public funds to big business.

Significantly, Bayrou himself made a nod in Terra Nova’s direction in his La Grande-Motte speech, praising “democratic progressives.” Citing the examples of India, Japan and the US, Bayrou declared: “Democratic progressives are those who make the world move.”

There can be no clearer demonstration of the class character of what the PS and Bayrou are preparing than the invocation of these governments. In all cases, politicians falsely portrayed as “left” to the general public were brought in to continue and extend the policies of their right-wing predecessors. The PS and Bayrou would be brought in to replace Sarkozy with similar effects.

In Italy, the centre-left coalition led by Romano Prodi came to power in 2006 with the support of the entire official left—notably Rifondazione Comunista (Communist Refoundation). It carried out social austerity policies, notably with a massive pension cut, and supported additional Italian deployments in Afghanistan. It was voted out of office in 2008.

The recent electoral collapse of Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which ruled Japan for decades, led to the victory of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ). The leading figures in the DPJ are ex-LDP members, including party leader Yukio Hatoyama. Since the DPJ won the election, top DPJ official Hirohisa Fujii has already announced plans for “substantial” cuts in public spending.

In the US, the election of Obama was a popular repudiation of the preceding Bush administration. Since coming to power, however, Obama has ruthlessly pursued the pro-business and militarist policies of his predecessor—handing over trillions of dollars to Wall Street, continuing the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, gutting wages and benefits in the automobile industry, and preparing to slash healthcare in the guise of a “reform.”

Signals of support from the “far left”

The reaction of the French “far left”—notably Olivier Besancenot’s NPA—has been a cynical adaptation to the PS’s electoral manoeuvres. Having justified its orientation to the PS and its satellite parties such as the PCF by the slogan of “unitary” struggles of all the left to “beat the right,” it is now signaling that it could also work with sections of the right. Its minor reservations about openly backing the PS and MoDem are entirely bound up with its desire to avoid completely discrediting itself before public opinion.

In its September 8 statement, the NPA initially struck a critical tone. It noted that a PS-Bayrou alliance “would be exactly the same scenario that led to catastrophe in Italy. Allied to the centrist Romano Prodi-former Christian Democrat, the left beat Berlusconi but then disappointed popular expectations, letting Berlusconi return to power. Today, there is not a single left member of the Italian parliament.”

It concluded its statement by appealing to a number of parties, including the PCF (a government coalition partner of the PS since the 1980s) and the Left Party of Jean-Luc Mélenchon (a PS split-off) to “rally together.”

The NPA’s pose of hostility to a replay of the Italian experience is both hypocritical and fraudulent. Its organic orientation to the state parties of the French bourgeois left—most immediately, the PCF—inevitably leads it down the path followed by its Italian co-thinkers, organised since 2007 in the Pabloite organisation Sinistra Critica. The Italian Pabloites participated in the Stalinist Rifondazione Comunista, which was a crucial component of Prodi’s coalition. Today, the NPA is deepening its relations with the PCF, as the PCF and the PS together move towards Bayrou.

Clutching the PS ever more closely in order to save its positions in regional administrations, the PCF is preparing alliances with the PS in the first round of 2010 regional election. PCF leader Marie-George Buffet has invited the NPA to attend joint PCF-PS “thematic workshops,” saying that it would “get the left out of the quagmire in which it is sinking faced with Sarkozy.”

The PCF is also closely involved in the developing relations between the PS and Bayrou. According to the French daily *Libération* on September 11: “In Marseille, MoDem vice-president and European deputy Jean-Luc Bennaïm already began discussions with the socialists and communists.”

It was left to Besancenot to give a coded signal that the NPA would find ways to work with whatever coalition the PS would finally devise.

Summarising a TV interview with a number of politicians including Besancenot, news magazine *Marianne* wrote on September 8: “The most concrete proposition for an accord between opposition parties came from where one would not have expected it: Olivier Besancenot! The NPA leader posed the proviso: there are subjects on which his party cannot reach accords with the other political formations, but there are struggles, he added, around which everyone should be able to get together, like during the CPE.”

This reference—to the mass protests in 2006 against the CPE (*Contrat de Première Embauche*, First Job Contract) proposed by then-Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin—was an unmistakable signal that the NPA is willing to work with right-wing figures in order to preserve its alliance with the PCF and PS.

In 2006, the NPA’s predecessor organisation (the *Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire*) worked together with the trade unions, the PCF, and then-Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy to defeat the CPE bill and end the mass protests. In exchange for rallying support in the UMP for killing the CPE, Sarkozy obtained a certain populist credibility that helped him win the 2007 elections.

Besancenot’s more recent comments indicate that the NPA would be willing to “struggle” again in conjunction with France’s bourgeois

parties, this time with Bayrou as its right-wing partner.



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