

French Socialist Party advocates fraudulent “Real Equality” program

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On November 9, the executive council of the Socialist Party (PS) adopted a text on "Real Equality," introduced as a road map for the next 15 years. It contains various proposals on education, health, public services and housing.

This is a cynical maneuver by the PS, aiming to appeal to public opposition to President Nicolas Sarkozy's social cuts. Last month saw massive strikes and protests, including a weeks-long oil and port strike, against pension cuts that included a 2-year increase in both the minimum and full retirement age. The PS responded by claiming that it wanted to leave the minimum pension age at 60 while discreetly supporting other pension cuts, like lengthening the pay-in period and raising the full pension age from 65 to 67.

The pressure on the PS is all the more intense to present a false "left" face to the public, as it has not benefited politically from rising popular anger with Sarkozy. A recent poll found that 62 percent of the population does not trust the PS, and thinks that it would not carry out its promise to return the minimum retirement to 60 once it came to power. This popular distrust is entirely justified, given the PS's right-wing record.

The text was prepared by the PS's spokesman, Benoît Hamon. He has tried to maintain good relations with demonstrators in the recent strikes, and has appeared with Olivier Besancenot of the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA) in several meetings.

The introduction states: "The Socialists' project gives priority to improving living conditions for citizens, whatever their place in the social hierarchy. This is why we want to reduce inequalities in revenue, living conditions, health, housing, and education."

In fact, these claims are altogether shattered by an examination of the “Real Equality” measures

themselves. While some of them—such as limiting revolving credit—would be progressive if implemented under conditions of economic prosperity, the most important ones are thoroughly reactionary.

Proposals to give schools autonomy in managing their assets lay the basis for the break-up of national education and its privatization. Plans to forcibly enroll all young people in a “one-year civic service” deprive them of wages and pave the way for conscription. As for convening a “great annual discussion on wages,” there can be no doubt that this would be the pretext for attempts to enforce massive cuts, especially given the ongoing economic crisis.

While Hamon is fraudulently trying to appeal to social discontent on this right-wing basis, other leading PS members have come out to denounce Hamon's text, implicitly advocating more social cuts. They criticized the absence of explicit financing for the measures, under circumstances where they are preparing drastic budget cuts.

François Hollande, former PS first secretary said: “The cost of the Real Equality measures is impossible to evaluate. Before publishing the report, one would have had to evaluate the room for maneuver that one has.” He derided the plan as “Father Christmas's bag of goodies.”

Pierre Moscovici, a PS deputy and close ally of IMF head Dominique Strauss-Kahn, said: “These 200 propositions do not commit the PS to anything, but they are a box of ideas.” He also criticized Hamon for “not having evaluated the cost and suggested financing for his propositions.”

Manuel Valls, a PS deputy who has declared his candidacy for the PS primary for 2012 presidential

election, told the daily *Le Parisien* that France needed a “real fiscal revolution” and “cost-cutting in the State.” With Hamon’s proposals, Valls said, “we’re doing the reverse.”

Such comments give a fairly accurate picture of the policies the PS plans to pursue. It is well known that previous PS governments of President François Mitterrand (1981-1995) and Prime Minister Lionel Jospin (1997-2002) carried out mass layoffs, social cuts, and privatizations. The PS’s policies are in line with its social-democratic counterparts in Greece, Portugal and Spain, who have imposed drastic social cuts on the working class to satisfy the banks and financial markets amid the current economic crisis.

The right-wing daily *Le Figaro* commented: “The Hamon report has reignited the old fear of PS reformists: by promising too much while out of power, they will not be able to carry out their promises in power, they will disappoint their electorate and then be forced to carry out a turn to austerity policies, like François Mitterrand in 1983.”

In response to criticism of Hamon's text as unrealistic, PS first secretary Martine Aubry defended Hamon’s text, saying that most of the “PS has understood that the French people want us to be turned towards them, to bring them new and innovative solutions for another project besides the one that is breaking up France’s values today.”

Aubry cynically claimed that Hamon’s proposal was “real credibility for the Socialists today. Our path is of necessity to the left, because that is what will make us credible.”

That is, the PS feels the need to assume a “left” pose in order to appeal to social opposition and win elections, even though Aubry herself does not believe the promises she is making. Earlier this year, when Sarkozy was negotiating pension cuts with the trade unions, Aubry said she supported raising the retirement age from 60 years to 62.

Though she was praised for her comments by PS heavyweights including Hollande and Michel Rocard, she later withdrew her comments to conceal PS plans

for social austerity.

Even Hamon's views are not fundamentally different from those in the PS who openly call for social cuts. During the Greek debt crisis in the spring, Hamon implied that he supported Greek-style cuts for France, saying: “France has demanded this policy from Greece. When the European Commission then turns to France, how can France refuse to apply to itself the policy it demanded of Greece?”

Hamon ultimately helped impose the cuts on Greece, as well. Along with conservative and PS deputies, he voted in the National Assembly to fund France’s portion of the IMF-EU bailout package for Greece. This bailout helped rescue French banks who had invested in Greece, while widening the French budget deficit and leaving the Greek state just as indebted as before.

Hamon cynically told the press: “The money given by Europe would have been better used for economic stimulus, but it will not prevent us from voting to show our solidarity.”

The character of Hamon’s “solidarity” was reactionary and false. The IMF-EU bailout produced a catastrophic decline in the living standards of the working class in Greece. Having come to power promising to increase social programs, as Hamon does today, Greek social-democratic Prime Minister Giorgios Papandreou carried out massive job cuts, pension cuts, and privatizations of state industries. According to press estimates, these have produced an average 30 percent decline in workers’ living standards.



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