

French magazine *Politis* promotes petition on pension reform

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Following the strike wave in France against the legislation on reform of retirement pensions, which has since been adopted, on October 10 the magazine *Politis* launched a petition for a referendum on the new pensions law. The petition advocated by *Politis*, which is closely associated with the anti-globalisation group ATTAC, asks voters to pronounce themselves for or against President Nicolas Sarkozy's pension reforms.

Politis is thus taking advantage of a law which states that if a petition obtains the support of 10 percent of the population, and is then supported by a fifth of parliamentary representatives, the government must organize a referendum.

Politis' initiative promotes the illusion that the Socialist Party (PS) parliamentary deputies would be amenable to a referendum on the pension reforms. This is an attempt by *Politis* to spread illusions in the PS, whose opposition to the reforms is entirely artificial. By implying that workers could fight the reforms through parliamentary channels, *Politis* was seeking to demoralize the strikers by wrongly suggesting that the defeat of the strikes would not be fatal for the struggle against the reform.

The illusions spread by the *Politis* appeal correspond to the anti-working class orientation of this publication. *Politis* was founded in 1988 by Bernard Langlois, an anti-globalisation journalist. The independent magazine provides space to the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois "left" parties such as the PS, French Communist Party (PCF) and the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA), as well as to organizations like ATTAC and the Alternatifs movement.

The attempt to dupe workers with the perspective of organizing a referendum is not new. In 2007, then-prime minister Dominique de Villepin wanted to create the First Job Contract (CPE) for the young

unemployed, an initiative designed to maintain them in a permanent state of job insecurity. The group Rupture launched a petition along the same lines as that of *Politis*, which led to nothing.

The first signatories of the *Politis* petition for a referendum were the Stalinist National Assembly deputies of the PCF, the Alternatifs, Unitary Communists and Jean-Luc Mélenchon of the Left Party (PG). The New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) issued no statement following the appeal.

None of these parties or associations wanted to mobilize workers in a political struggle against the government, independent of the trade unions, which, in spite of the popular opposition to the reform, sought only to negotiate its acceptance. The petition was thus, for them, a way in which to cover for their own reactionary role during the October/November strike movement.

Port and refinery workers were able to paralyse the economy during the strike wave, but the Sarkozy government sent in the CRS riot police to unblock the refineries and oil depots. The CGT (Confédération Générale du Travail) did not call for a wider strike movement of the working class to defend the sections of workers under attack from the police, but limited itself to calls for symbolic actions. This signified that the CGT would not oppose a government attack against the working class.

The pensions legislation has been the central policy of the Sarkozy government, which made no concessions even though millions of people took to the streets. The PS, like the trade unions, advanced a fictitious opposition as it defended the essentials of the legislation.

The traditional "left" parties and the trade unions have as their objective the defence of the interests of

French capitalism as it faces international competition. It was to this end in the 1980s when it was in office that the PS had initiated the cuts in social spending.

The present context of the world financial crisis forces the international bourgeoisie to attack the standard of living of the working class. The weakest countries of the eurozone are bordering on bankruptcy, while the financial aristocracy refuses to finance the public debt. And the bureaucracy of the European Union is forcing the governments of these countries to put austerity programs into place.

The conservative and social democratic governments throughout Europe are pushing through austerity programs. The Greek and Spanish governments sent in the army against national protests and the strike of air traffic controllers respectively. England, Germany and France are also applying austerity measures.

Politis and petty-bourgeois organisations in France want to make people believe that the criticisms presented by the PS constitute a real alternative to the politics of Sarkozy. But their real intention is to demagogically mask their own politics. The lie perpetrated by *Politis* is founded on the hollow promises of the PS to return the legal age of retirement to 60 years if they get back into government, whilst lengthening the pay-in period of workers' contributions, which effectively renders retirement at 60 impossible.

PS leaders have expressed their support for the pension reforms on numerous occasions. International Monetary Fund Director General Dominique Strauss-Kahn, who is a PS member, has defended Sarkozy's pension reforms, in line with the entire international bourgeoisie.

In a January 19, 2010 article headlined, "Aubry renounces the dogma of retirement at 60", *Figaro* wrote: "Another leader at la rue Solferino (PS headquarters), Martine Aubry, knows from being a former minister of labour that the retirement pensions system cannot be left in its current state. She will refuse the logic of systematic opposition."

In an October 28 interview published in *La Tribune*, Manuel Valls, the PS parliamentary deputy for Evry, insisted on the fact that the reform—undemocratically voted through the National Assembly despite enormous hostility in the population—had to be complied with: "Any republican must, it is true, call for the respect of

legislation adopted by parliament, validated by the Constitutional Council and promulgated by the head of state."

Opinion polls show that 62 percent of the population quite rightly places no confidence in the PS and believes it will not implement its promise to return the retirement age of 60 once it gets into office. The position of PS First Secretary Martine Aubry, that once in office the party would bring back retirement at 60, is a political lie. She is attempting to assume a "left" posture, confronted with the growing hostility of the working class to Sarkozy's policies.

This contrast, between a public opinion relatively mistrustful of the PS, and the petty-bourgeois parties around *Politis*, which support the PS, underlines an essential truth: the "left" and "far left" are well to the right of the mass of working people, who are moving to the left.

During the protests against the pension reform, the NPA sought to bring together all of the "left". Joint meetings were held by Olivier Besancenot, its spokesman, and PS spokesman Benoît Hamon. Besancenot spoke of the experience of the 1936 Popular Front as an objective to be realised, as if that political defeat of the working class was of no consequence. This was part of a wider campaign of the unions and petty-bourgeois parties aimed at putting an end to the strike movement and turning popular discontent into the dead end of support for the PS in the presidential election set for 2012.



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