

France's Socialist Party nominates “Mr. Normal” as its presidential candidate

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On Sunday, François Hollande won the social-democratic Socialist Party (PS) primary run-off to become the party's candidate in the 2012 French presidential elections. He polled 56.6 percent against Martine Aubry—the former number-two in the 1997-2002 Plural Left government of Lionel Jospin—who polled 43.4 percent. Just under 3 million people took part in the vote.

Hollande, an undistinguished high-level PS bureaucrat, is now widely dubbed “Mr. Normal” after remarking that he would be a “normal” president. Polls indicate that, were the election to take place today, he would defeat the deeply unpopular incumbent, conservative President Nicolas Sarkozy.

The policies of Hollande and Aubry were virtually indistinguishable, based on their support for the austerity policies pursued by Sarkozy and the entire ruling class after the outbreak of the financial crisis in Europe. Both pledged to cut the state budget deficit from 5.7 percent to 3.0 percent of GDP in 2013, to obey the Maastricht treaty, meaning massive cuts in state spending. They are completely servile to the banks and finance capital.

Hollande deceitfully tried to give his pro-austerity policy a veneer of popularity by combining it with empty, demagogic appeals to popular anger at the financial markets. He said that “the debt is the enemy of the left and of France,” using this in the manner of any right-wing politician to push for unpopular cuts in public spending: “We have to balance our public accounts from 2013.... [O]nly then can our country get its confidence back.”

He has stressed that his main target will be the workers. In his book *Parlons de la France* (*Let's talk about France*), published last September, Hollande attacked welfare-state conceptions and “conceptual rigidity” of the left and. He urged “realism and budgetary discipline.” That is, the PS is determined to loot the public to fund the banks and the financial aristocracy.

The three leading bourgeois candidates in the 2012 elections will be Sarkozy, Hollande, and the neo-fascist candidate Marine Le Pen. Given the pro-establishment politics of the PS and its “left” satellites, Le Pen is left in the strongest position to posture as the representative of popular opposition among the existing political parties.

The working class is completely disenfranchised by the political establishment, and workers can expect nothing from reforming or pressuring it. The only way forward is a revolutionary struggle against capitalism and those—such as the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA) and the Left Front led by ex-PS minister Jean-Luc Mélenchon—who serve to bolster or promote illusions in the PS.

In Hollande, the PS has selected a candidate reflecting the party's long right-wing history and its deep hostility to the working class. Hollande, 57, joined the PS in 1979 and worked in a team of bourgeois economists led by Jacques Attali, advising François Mitterrand in his bid for the presidency. Upon his election in 1981, Mitterrand gave Hollande an official post at the Elysée presidential palace, as an economic adviser.

Hollande remained loyal to the president when, in 1982-1983, Mitterrand abandoned his reformist election programme, pushing through austerity measures and closing down numerous factories.

In 1999, Hollande became vice president of the social-democratic Socialist International. There he met not only fellow European imperialist politicians, but Third-World dictators toppled this year by revolutionary working-class struggles—Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali of Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak of Egypt. The latter two were hastily expelled from the organisation after they were overthrown.

In 2004, he organised the campaign in the PS for the free-market EU constitution in the referendum and, as first secretary of the PS, worked hand in hand with the Gaullist government of Jacques Chirac for a yes vote. The mass of the working class rejected the constitution.

He has supported France's imperialist wars, including its participation in the NATO occupation of Afghanistan starting under Jospin in 2001 and the ongoing neo-colonial rape of Libya.

Should Hollande win the presidency, he will seek to wage a relentless social war against the workers. One of his models will be George Papandreou, Greece's social-democratic prime minister, who was elected in 2009 on vague promises of minor social reforms and is now pauperising the Greek masses to satisfy the demands of international finance capital. Last Friday, Papandreou threatened to mobilise the army to break the strike of refuse collectors, threatening them with jail time (see “Greek refuse workers threatened with army intervention on eve of general strike”).

The banks are already pressing for austerity policies from the next government. The day after Hollande won the PS primary, the credit rating agency Moody's issued a warning over the slowing French economy and debts that France will incur if it reimburses all French banks' bad Greek debts. Moody's gave France three months to drastically cut public spending. Otherwise, it will downgrade France's AAA credit rating, which enables France to borrow money at lower interest rates.

Substantial right-wing sections of the bourgeoisie see Hollande as their candidate. Former right-wing

president Jacques Chirac said he would vote for Hollande against Sarkozy. Hollande has brought into his campaign team the PS's Jean-Pierre Jouyet, who took a position as secretary of state for European affairs in the right-wing Sarkozy administration in 2008. Jouyet expects to become secretary general of the Elysée if Hollande wins the presidency.

For its part, the official “left” of the bourgeois establishment is now fully engaged in promoting Hollande. The PS's Arnaud Montebourg—who posed as a “left” candidate in the primaries, saying he would repeal Sarkozy's pension cuts and carry out a protectionist trade policy—has become an unabashed proponent of Hollande's pro-austerity candidacy.

Montebourg told his supporters that he would vote Hollande in the elections. He gushed that Hollande's victory meant that the PS now has “an unchallenged leader,” ludicrously claiming there had been “an extraordinary renewal process in the party.”

His protectionist platform aimed to appeal to pseudo-left parties like the Left Front, which includes the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF), and the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA). These parties try to maintain illusions about the PS in their voting base, to block opposition from the left to Hollande's anti-worker candidacy. The PCF depends financially and politically on PS support, and increasingly large sections of the NPA want to develop a governing alliance with the PS (see “French New Anti-Capitalist Party's summer school marks new rightward lurch”).

Mélenchon of the Left Front called Hollande's programme the “absolute minimum left” and, in an interview with *Médiapart* on October 18, praised Hollande as “an intelligent and cultivated person who has things to say.”



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