

French Socialist Party presidential candidate falls behind Sarkozy in polls

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Last week, polls on the French presidential elections showed the unpopular incumbent, President Nicolas Sarkozy, tying or pulling ahead of Socialist Party (PS) candidate François Hollande. The polls indicate that Hollande would receive fewer votes than Sarkozy in the first round of the elections, scheduled for April 22, though he still would win in the subsequent runoff against Sarkozy.

A March 12 Ifop poll showed Sarkozy with 28.5 percent and Hollande with 27 percent of the vote. A later CSA poll showed the two both receiving 28 percent. The CSA poll found that Hollande would win in the second round with 54 percent of the vote, down two points from a previous survey.

Hollande's defenders were quick to cite a rival TNS Sofres-iTélé poll showing Hollande still leading with 30 percent of the vote against 26 percent for Sarkozy. Newspapers soon began offering various explanations for the discrepancy. *Le Monde* cited "gaps in the 'raw' data gathered by the two institutes" and "differences in the rectifications carried out based on these raw data."

The newspaper did not make clear how often, and how aggressively, polls are "rectified." However, the reaction to the polls in the political establishment has made one thing clear: the polls have shattered the PS's hopes of an easy victory due solely to voter opposition to President Sarkozy and his policies of imperialist war and social austerity.

Hollande campaign official Stéphane Le Foll commented, "This reminds everyone that nothing is finished ... It will be a tighter race than was foreseen."

An anonymous PS official said, "It's running on empty ... His team had theorized that he had won the elections and that he had to do as little as possible. François is pretending to campaign. He is behaving like François Hollande."

In fact, the PS has run a largely right-wing election campaign. After a series of provocative gestures by Hollande's campaign, large numbers of people have concluded that Hollande represents the same reactionary interests as Sarkozy.

Such sentiment broadly reflects the popular response to the policies of social democrats throughout Europe after the outbreak of the European sovereign debt crisis. Social democratic prime ministers José Sócrates of Portugal, José Luis Zapatero of Spain and George Papandreou of Greece all carried out deep cuts that impoverished the working class. With French auto production collapsing 20 percent over the last year and the trade deficit rising to a record 75 billion euros (\$99 billion), there is an increasing sense that Hollande will similarly seek to impose economic "shock therapy" in France.

On February 27, Hollande's campaign announced that he would leave untouched Sarkozy's most unpopular policies: pension "reform" increasing the mandatory pay-in period to 41 years, attacks on democratic rights including the burqa ban and mass deportations of Roma, public-sector job cuts, and support for US foreign policy through France's reintegration into the NATO command. Since being brought back into the NATO command, France has participated in unpopular US-led wars, notably in Afghanistan and Libya.

Shortly after issuing this announcement, Hollande claimed he would tax the wealthy at 75 percent. This was widely understood to be a lie. An anonymous banker supporting Hollande called the gesture “a bit demagogic,” but indicated he was not worried about Hollande’s future policies. (See: “French Socialist Party presidential candidate issues bogus pledge to tax the rich”)

Hollande also has proposed that the minimum wage be linked to economic growth statistics and not to inflation. Amid falling economic growth and rapidly rising prices, this would be a recipe for deep cuts in workers’ purchasing power.

To some extent, Hollande’s falling poll numbers reflect a slight shift of his voters towards Jean-Luc Mélenchon—a former PS minister running as the candidate of the Left Front, an umbrella group dominated by the French Communist Party (PCF). The rise in support for Mélenchon is largely among retirees (7.4 percent to 9.3 percent) and middle managers (9.7 to 12 percent)—two key bases of electoral support for the PCF.

The fact that more voters did not shift to Mélenchon reflects broad popular alienation from and anger with the entire political establishment. Working people sense that neither the Left Front nor petty-bourgeois “left” parties like the New Anti-Capitalist Party offer a political alternative. These forces have organized no real opposition to Sarkozy and tacitly supported his decision to crush a strike by oil and refinery workers against his pension cuts in October 2010.

The growing gulf between the working population and all the forces of the political establishment—including the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois “left” parties—foreshadows explosive social struggles in the aftermath of the 2012 elections, as the ruling class presses for deeply unpopular cuts and enters into new wars despite mass opposition in the working class.

Sarkozy’s Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) has responded to the bankruptcy of the “left” parties by

repeatedly attacking Hollande, seeking to boost Sarkozy’s support by exploiting the popular intuition that Hollande is not what he claims to be.

Conservative Prime Minister François Fillon gave a full-page interview in the right-wing daily *Le Figaro* Friday, attacking Hollande as “irresponsible” and capable only of making “colorless proposals.”

In a televised debate with Hollande Thursday, UMP party leader Jean-François Copé repeatedly mocked Hollande for advocating right-wing policies supported by the UMP. Questioned by Copé on his policies on police and immigration issues, Hollande proposed building more prisons and opposed legalizing illegal immigrants—at which point Copé replied: “You are thus exactly proposing the policies we would like to enforce.”

Copé called Hollande an “eel” that “listens and says to everyone what they want to hear.”



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