

French President Sarkozy appeals to neo-fascist vote

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Beaten into second place by Socialist Party (PS) challenger François Hollande in Sunday's first round of the presidential elections, President Nicolas Sarkozy is desperate to win the votes of the 6.5 million people who voted for the third placed candidate, the neo-fascist Marine Le Pen. He needs them to overtake Hollande in the runoff on May 6.

Opinion polls predict a comfortable win for Hollande, with 56 percent of the vote. At present, polls show that some 60 percent of Le Pen's voters will transfer their votes to Sarkozy, but it is calculated that Sarkozy will need 70 percent to win.

Throughout the election campaign, Sarkozy has sought to divert attention from his record of unpopular austerity measures and to win Le Pen's potential voters by appealing to anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, and law-and-order sentiment.

On Tuesday, Sarkozy stated that Marine Le Pen “is compatible with the Republic”—a statement that UMP officials Jean-François Copé and Xavier Bertrand initially attempted to deny that Sarkozy had made.

Such a comment has immense political implications. A French head of state has formally stated that in his opinion, the legal structure of French bourgeois rule is compatible with neo-fascism, and a member of the party whose longtime leader, Jean-Marie Le Pen, dismissed the Holocaust as a “detail” of history. It reflects a profound crisis of bourgeois rule in France and throughout Europe.

The *Nouvel Observateur* commented, “Until then, on the right, apart from in the ranks of the Popular Right [a far right grouping within the ruling UMP – Union for a Popular Movement], they have limited themselves to stressing that the FN is a legal party. Sarkozy is here suggesting that the Lepenist party is a republican party, which would defend republican values.”

There has been some disquiet in circles within the ruling UMP (Union for a Popular Movement) close to former president Jacques Chirac, who fear the identification of the Gaullist movement with fascism. However, Sarkozy's former minister of sport, Chantal Jouanno stated that in contests in the legislative elections next June between FN and PS candidates she would vote PS, she, was criticized by Prime Minister François Fillon. Sarkozy's campaign spokesperson Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet has said she would vote PS, like Jouanno.

Sarkozy has made clear that his campaign intends to pursue its neo-fascistic appeal. In line with his Islamophobic anti-burqa law and his mass deportations of Roma and undocumented immigrants, Sarkozy has launched lying claims that most of the meat in the Paris region is halal, and recently that 700 mosques have called for a vote for Hollande. He has pledged to cut legal immigration by half and reinstate national border controls.

The assertions of PS leaders such as Arnaud Montebourg, who have sought to criticize Sarkozy by asserting that Le Pen “is not compatible with the Republic,” are completely hypocritical, however.

Sarkozy's public legitimization of Le Pen reflects the views of Sarkozy not only as a candidate, but also as France's head of state for five years now. He has implemented a series of policies—notably relating to attacks on democratic rights, and imperialist wars—that have played a major role in legitimizing Le Pen and creating a situation in which her National Front (FN) is an accepted part of the political establishment.

These reactionary policies have enjoyed the full support of the PS. The PS supported Sarkozy's legislation banning the burqa and, before that, the Islamic scarf in schools. The PS and the French

bourgeoisie, in general, backed Sarkozy's neo-colonial wars in Afghanistan, Libya and now Syria, trying to limit popular opposition to these wars by promoting Islamophobia. This support was not limited to the PS, but also included its satellites: the New Anti-capitalist Party, the French Communist Party (PCF), and the Left Party.

This has a broad significance going beyond the policies of either the UMP or the PS candidate. Four years after the beginning of the world financial crisis, the French bourgeoisie is again promoting political conceptions it had not embraced since the Great Depression of the 1930s—a decade that ended with the collaboration of the Vichy government of Marshal Philippe Pétain with the Nazis during the Occupation of 1940-1944. (See also: Back to Vichy)

This is reflected in the conduct of the Hollande campaign itself. Hollande is now capitulating to the racist sentiment promoted by the UMP and FN, backpedaling on his promise to legislate this autumn the right to vote for foreigners in local elections. He said it would be in 2013, in time for the 2014 municipal elections, insisting that “there is no specific timetable.”

An election promise of the PS for over 30 years, consistently abandoned when in office, the right to vote of resident foreigners in local elections has long been commonplace in most European countries. Ségolène Royal, the defeated PS candidate in the 2007 presidential elections, asserted on Monday: “It's never been our priority.” She added: “Those who are worried about the influx of illegal immigrants are not racists.”

Since the imposition in 1983 of austerity by the PS government under President François Mitterrand, the PS and its ally the PCF have lost all credibility as defenders of the working class. Polls have found that over 30 percent of industrial workers voted for Le Pen.

On Wednesday on France 2 TV, Hollande asserted: “I listen to the workers who are thinking about relocations and who are expressing their anger by voting for Le Pen.” At Hirson he insisted that he could cater to their needs by working for a reorientation of Europe and an industrial policy: “I've heard the cries of anger, I've responded with a message of hope.”

Hollande issued the empty promise, on the news of the threatened loss of 5,000 jobs at Neo Sécurité, that he would not allow the string of redundancy plans to be announced after the elections. Sarkozy reportedly asked

executives not to announce major layoffs during the presidential campaign, so it is expected that they will come after the elections are over.



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