

French unions, petty bourgeois groups back bourgeois “left” candidate in May Day rallies

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2 May 2012

Trade unions and petty bourgeois “left” parties organised May Day marches throughout France yesterday. In an act of political fraud, they used the international proletarian holiday to back the pro-austerity, pro-war Socialist Party (PS) presidential candidate François Hollande in the May 6 run-off against right-wing incumbent President Nicolas Sarkozy.

The marches were largely dominated by the unions, including the Stalinist-dominated CGT (General Confederation of Labor), the CFDT (linked to the PS), FSU, Solidaire and UNSA. They were backed by the PS and its political satellites, such as the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF), Jean Luc Mélenchon’s Left Party (PG), and petty-bourgeois “left” groups such as the New Anti-Capitalist Party and the LO (Workers Struggle).

According to the CGT, up to 750,000 people took part in an estimated 300 demonstrations across France, including 250,000 in Paris, 40,000 in Toulouse, 20,000 in Marseille, 12,000 in Bordeaux, and 10,000 in Lyon, Nancy and Nantes; between 3,000 and 10,000 took part in Strasbourg, Montpellier, Limoges and Amiens. However, the French interior ministry claimed that 300,000 marched across France, with 48,000 people in Paris.

In Paris, workers from the Peugeot/Citroen auto plant in Aulnay-sous-Bois, which faces a closure threatening over 3,000 jobs, took part in the march. Undocumented immigrants also attended the rally.

At the head of the march, CGT leader Bernard Thibault and the CFDT’s François Chérèque were side by side. The CGT, FSU and Solidaires have openly called for a vote for Hollande. Asked whether he would

vote for Hollande, Thibault told Europe 1: “Yes, the CGT has called for the defeat of the current president of the Republic.”

Leading PS members—PS secretary Martine Aubry, 2007 presidential candidate Segolène Royal and Hollande campaign director Manuel Valls—were at the rally, along with former Left Front candidate Jean Luc Mélenchon and leading PCF members.

Mélenchon called for a Hollande vote, saying: “We are mobilizing against [Sarkozy] and on Sunday we will throw him out. We know why we’re here.”

Members of the petty bourgeois “left” NPA and the LO marched together with the PS and the Left Front. Marching in Bordeaux, NPA presidential candidate Phillipe Poutou called for a Hollande vote: “A Hollande ballot is a tool to throw out Sarkozy in the second round of the presidential election. If Sarkozy leaves, we will have the feeling of a victory, it will make us feel better and allow us to build more mobilizations.”

Such statements are the outcome of decades in which the PCF, NPA and other petty-bourgeois forces backed anti-worker policies implemented by the PS in government, notably after PS President François Mitterrand’s 1983 “austerity turn”. These parties are indifferent to the social and economic problems confronting the working class. They made every effort to turn it into a Hollande election rally, fraudulently claiming he is fighting for “jobs, purchasing power, and the struggle against racism and xenophobia.”

Ten years ago, these forces campaigned for incumbent right-wing President Jacques Chirac against neo-fascist National Front (FN) leader Jean Marie Le Pen in the run-off, after Le Pen defeated PS candidate Lionel Jospin in the first round. Having compromised with reactionary social and anti-democratic measures promoted by the ruling class over the last ten years, they are again campaigning for a reactionary PS government to disorient the working class.

Hollande, who skipped the rallies to attend a commemoration for former Prime Minister Pierre Bérégovoy in Nevers, has repeatedly pledged to slash social spending. He has said he has no differences in foreign policy with Sarkozy, who has escalated French imperialism's war drive in Africa and the Middle East—with wars last year in Libya and now in Syria.

Ahead of the protest, on April 30, Hollande send a letter to the unions praising their role in negotiating social legislation in France. He said he would call a “big social conference” if elected. He wrote, “We must pass from commanding to consulting, from monologues to discussion, from listening at a distance to negotiation,” stressing he would work with the unions if elected.

Hollande's cynical phrases about Sarkozy “commanding” the unions seek to gloss over the well-known fact that the unions worked closely with Sarkozy to repeatedly slash pensions and labor protections during his five-year term. Now, the unions are trying to distance themselves from Sarkozy and orienting towards Hollande. For his part, Sarkozy accused the unions of “betraying the trade union cause by opposing me in the presidential election.”

After Sarkozy criticized the unions, Prime Minister François Fillon praised their role, saying he did not like “criticisms of the unions as such, as they are necessary to the functioning of the economy and the French social system.”

For their part, trade unions made clear that without their assistance it would be impossible to implement social cuts against the working class. The CFDT's François Chérèque bluntly said: “The prime minister knows that he could rely on the CFDT to do the

[pension] reform of 2003. We are not an organization that blocks reforms.”

On Monday, Chérèque gave an interview to the daily *Liberation*, making clear that the unions plan to participate in talks with the state and the business federation MEDEF to negotiate wage cuts and other social cuts under the next government. “We will therefore carry out a real investment policy ... and we will not fear having a debate about the cost of labor,” he said.



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