

Protests greet French government debate on pro-austerity European treaty

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An estimated 50,000 people marched through Paris on Sunday against the European Stability Treaty and the austerity policies of the Socialist Party (PS) government of François Hollande.

The previous day tens of thousands of workers, young people, unemployed and retirees had marched in demonstrations throughout Portugal and Spain against austerity policies imposed by the banks and the European Union (EU) governments.

The demonstration came amid rising popular opposition to the austerity policies Hollande has pursued since he defeated the conservative incumbent, Nicolas Sarkozy, in France's presidential elections in May.

The *Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace* paper commented that “for some of his voters and even of his party members”, Hollande represents “a type of continuity with the previous government” and is evoking “disenchantment.”

This is particularly evident on the European treaty. Having cynically campaigned on election promises that “austerity is not an unavoidable destiny”, Hollande is promoting a treaty that will force governments to cut budget deficits and pay off the banks, while austerity measures that are already pauperizing large sections of the European working class are to be intensified.

The government presented the treaty to parliament yesterday with the full support of Sarkozy's conservative UMP (Union for a Popular Movement). Known as the Merkozy treaty, it was largely jointly drawn up by German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Sarkozy.

On Friday Hollande also announced an austerity budget for 2013 with €30 billion (US\$39 billion) in deficit cuts. The PS government has also stood by as plant closures and mass sackings proceeded at major

employers including automaker PSA, ArcelorMittal steel, and pharmaceutical firm Sanofi.

Many marchers on Sunday expressed disappointment in Hollande's four months in office and said they'd been “conned”. Most had voted for Mélenchon in the first round and Hollande in the second.

Jordi, from Nantes told *Libération*: “Hollande had committed himself to renegotiating the Merkozy treaty, but not a comma has been changed”. Others said: “This treaty will pauperise the people ... France is going to end up like Spain and Greece.”

Christine, a French teacher in a Paris high school, expressed the mounting disillusionment of those who had been told by Mélenchon that a PS government could be forced to oppose the diktats of the banks. She regretted that some proposals, such as the right to vote for immigrants in local elections, had not been applied: “Hollande had promised that he would govern differently. ... To tell the truth, when he got in I was expecting something feeble, but not this feeble.”

In fact, Hollande is proceeding ruthlessly to implement the dictates of the ruling class. If it appears that he is “feeble”, it is because France's petty-bourgeois “left” forces—which called the demonstration—promote the illusion that Hollande is trying to help the workers. Hollande then appears “feeble” because he adopts policies that do not help, but rather hurt the working class—in line with the interests of finance capital.

The Paris protest was called by Jean-Luc Mélenchon—the presidential candidate of the Left Front alliance of the Left Party (PG), a PS split-off, and the Stalinist Communist Party (PCF)—and was supported by 60 pseudo-left parties and associations. These included the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA), the anti-globalization ATTAC movement, and the PCF-

dominated General Confederation of Labor (CGT) union.

These organizations' decision to call the protest was deeply cynical. They support the PS and called for an unconditional vote for Hollande in the May presidential elections, knowing full well that Hollande's priority was social austerity and passing reactionary European legislation. They are calling the protest merely as a safety valve amid rising popular anger, to disguise the fact that they support the Hollande government as it presses ahead with its austerity agenda.

Their central fear is that the working class could otherwise enter into an uncontrolled political struggle against the PS government, the banks and European austerity measures, with revolutionary implications.

The march's organisers claimed that they hoped the march would influence the debates on the European treaty that began yesterday in parliament. Mélenchon himself claimed that "we will see things more clearly after the demonstration", though he pointedly refused to declare himself an "opponent" of the PS.

This is simply more of Mélenchon's dishonest bluster. Given that the PS has a majority and also has the support of the UMP, the Left Front's 10 deputies—together with other parliamentary small fry like the Greens and a few dissident PS deputies—will have no impact at all. They would at most provide political support for whatever changes the PS decides it wants to make itself in the treaty.

Indeed, though the Greens' Federal Council voted in September to oppose the ratification of the treaty, the leadership have pledged to vote for the budget. Green leader Cécile Duflot declared last Thursday that the treaty is "the choice of a path to the reduction of the debt, in an untenable situation."

Mélenchon advances the reactionary and utopian view that the EU—made up of bourgeois governments of the right or the bourgeois "left"—can build "social Europe" as opposed to "the Europe of austerity."

Significantly, the Paris rally received greetings from another prominent proponent of this view: Alexis Tsipras, the leader of the petty-bourgeois "left" Greek party, SYRIZA, always lavishly praised by Mélenchon. During this year's Greek election, Tsipras repeatedly assured international media that he would arrange for the repayment of Greece's debts to the banks. (See: "Greek SYRIZA leader Tsipras pledges to repay banks

in European tour")



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