

French Greens, Stalinists staggered by President Hollande's unpopularity

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14 November 2012

The endorsement of former Airbus CEO Louis Gallois' competitiveness report by the Socialist Party (PS) government of President François Hollande has provoked a crisis among the PS' usual parliamentary and petty-bourgeois "left" allies. They have nervously watched Hollande's approval ratings collapse to 36 percent from 60 percent after his election in May.

Various parties that unconditionally supported Hollande's election—Europe Ecology/The Greens (EELV) and the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF)—are now cynically trying to distance themselves from his austerity policies. They aim to disorient popular opposition to Hollande, hoping to sow illusions that if the population supports them, they will shift Hollande's policies.

The Gallois report made Hollande's agenda quite clear, nakedly arguing for boosting French corporate competitiveness by lowering workers' living standards. It proposed a "competitiveness shock," with €20 billion (US\$25.4 billion) in cuts to corporate taxes, increases in value-added taxes and cuts to public spending. The €20 billion corporate tax cut will reduce labour costs by 6 percent.

On Friday EELV officials briefly threatened to quit the government. EELV Senate leader Jean-Vincent Placé said, "Since the post-Gallois report turn and very pro-business announcements without counter-offers or ecological conversion, I am increasingly puzzled at our participation in the government."

EELV occupies two ministerial posts, Housing and Foreign Affairs, and cynically postures as an advocate of the middle classes while signalling that it is a safe pair of hands for finance capital. Having voted against pro-austerity European treaty, EELV voted for the Organic law that inscribed the balanced-budget "golden

rule" into French law, a requirement listed in the EU fiscal treaty. EELV also voted for the 2013 French austerity budget.

After initial controversy inside EELV over his comments, Placé rapidly backed down from his criticisms. He stressed, "I never said that we would leave the government tomorrow."

There were also some impotent criticisms from the periphery of the PCF, the PS' long-time governing partner from the 1980s and 1990s. The PCF is technically not part of the governing parliamentary coalition, but in practice it supports the Hollande government.

On Monday the Left Party (PG) of former PS minister Jean-Luc Mélenchon—which serves as the go-between for the PS and the PCF—unveiled an "alternative budget." It calls for raising hundreds of billions of euros by taxing the wealthy in France. As with the PG's campaign proposal to raise the monthly minimum wage to €1700, this entirely legitimate demand is worthless because the PG has no intention of carrying it out.

A party of long-time PS operatives, the PG is closely integrated into the presentation of Hollande's austerity policies. It acts primarily to promote illusions that the class character of the PS' policies can be shifted by parliamentary manoeuvres carried out by PG members and hence block the development of politically independent opposition to Hollande's austerity measures. (See also: "What are the politics of French Left Front candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon?")

The collapse of the Hollande administration's support even moved the PCF to criticize Hollande. The PCF daily *l'Humanité* observed, "The recommendations of industrial boss Louis Gallois threaten to cost the French people dearly, very dearly,

without allowing our country to get out of an economic and financial dead end and thus develop jobs.”

L'Humanité cynically criticized Hollande's use of public money for corporate bailouts. It noted the funds “can be used for many other purposes than investment and jobs,” and that Hollande had not established job-creation and investment targets.

The paper kept silent on the fact that the Hollande administration is in fact using these funds to finance outsourcing and plant shutdowns negotiated with the union bureaucracy, inside which the PCF remains a leading political force.

L'Humanité sought to encourage illusions that pressure from forces like the PCF can shift Hollande's policies: “The government... is sinking into an austerity policy all of whose examples, in France and Europe, show that it leads into the wall. It is time to listen to the voices on the left that call for a change of course.”

Though *L'Humanité* does not say it, the most obvious recent precedent for Hollande's policy is that of social-democratic Prime Minister George Papandreou in Greece. Papandreou's policies have thrown Greek society back decades—producing a 25 percent contraction of Greece's economy, the collapse of health, education and social services, and the rise of unemployment to over 25 percent. *L'Humanité* cannot raise it directly, however, as this would make too clear the reactionary character of its endorsement of Hollande in the presidential elections.

This is because *L'Humanité's* criticisms reflect not opposition in the working class, but the concerns of the trade union bureaucracy and other sections of the affluent middle classes integrated into the French ruling elite, for which the PCF speaks. They do not object to Hollande's policy of plant closures or warn clearly of the potential impact of Hollande's spending cuts, but they are concerned at the implications for French capitalism of continuing along this path.

Their criticisms align them with sections of the French bourgeoisie concerned that Hollande's policy will condemn them to accepting German control of Europe and the euro zone. (See also: “Former finance minister confirms France considered leaving euro zone”)

Above all, they reflect growing concerns of the French ruling elite at the emergence of mass popular opposition to the Hollande from the left, which they

fear they could not control.

After taking power, the Hollande administration has ditched its fraudulent and ambiguous electoral promises and endorsed austerity policies and mass layoffs in key industries. The administration voted for the 2013 austerity budget that includes €30 billion in cuts to social spending. Last month, it ratified the European Union fiscal treaty designed to impose savage austerity measures by specifying stringent deficit-cutting targets.

The government, the unions and the bosses are negotiating “labour market” reforms to eliminate remaining labour protection, as well as slashing labour costs.

This highlights the political responsibility of the petty-bourgeois “left” parties in promoting Hollande's election. They channelled popular opposition to Sarkozy's policies behind Hollande, arguing that he would pursue less reactionary policies, even though they acknowledged that PS has had a record of anti-working class policies when in power.

Their bankrupt line has been refuted by Hollande's right wing policies. Hollande has approved measures initially proposed by his unpopular conservative predecessor Nicolas Sarkozy, including raising sales taxes and cutting labour costs by €20 billion—considerably more than the €13 billion Sarkozy initially proposed.

The opposition to Hollande government must be based on the independent political mobilization of the working class in a revolutionary struggle. The petty bourgeois “left,” which is organically tied to the PS, is deeply hostile to such a struggle.



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