

French Gaullist UMP party moves closer to neo-fascist National Front

Anthony Torres
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Last week, former Prime Minister François Fillon said that he no longer excluded the possibility that his right-wing Gaullist UMP (Union for a Popular Movement) could support a neo-fascist candidate of the National Front (FN). This highlights the rapid shift of the UMP, like all France's other political parties, to the extreme right.

Fillon had on previous occasions declared that there out of the “question to crawl before the extreme right”. Last year, he led a faction fight within the UMP against tendencies supporting Jean-François Copé, who called for an “unabashed” conservative movement with closer ties to the FN.

However, Fillon said last week that, in run-off votes between the ruling Socialist Party (PS) and the FN in next May's municipal elections, he recommended “voting for the least sectarian candidate”. He thus legitimized voting for the FN in the second round.

Geoffrey Didier, the co-founder of the Strong Right tendency, created by ex-far right activists who supported Copé's candidacy against Fillon as UMP First Secretary, welcomed this shift, calling it “an ideological victory” for its tendency. “We have always said that a part of our mission was to go towards FN voters, to address ourselves to them. The turn of François Fillon is truly an ideological victory for the Strong Right,” he said.

The UMP parliamentary deputy, Thierry Mariani, one of the founders of the Popular Right which is also on the right of the UMP, announced “with satisfaction that François Fillon has evolved with regard to his position on the FN.”

This strategy currently has right-wing voters' support. A BVA poll shows that 70 percent of right-wing sympathisers support Fillon's change in strategy, including 72 percent of UMP sympathisers.

Fillon's about-face led to protests from some UMP leaders, however. Former Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin, who supported Fillon against Copé last year, declared: “Red alert! The FN is a subject which could explode the UMP. It is our foundational pact which is being questioned.”

These remarks are cynical, because Raffarin when Prime Minister attacked the social gains of workers while encouraging anti-Islamic policies—such as the banning of the Islamic veil in schools—which has favoured the rise of the FN over the last decade.

However, the division inside the UMP is the reflection of profound class tensions which are developing within French and international politics. Weakened by a deep economic crisis and the growing opposition of workers to austerity and war, expressed in France by the massive hostility of the population towards the PS government, the capitalist class is moving towards fascism.

The PS is at the origin of the FN's rise. In the 1980's, President François Mitterrand of the PS used the FN—at the time, a small party of ex-far right students—to block the Gaullist forerunners of the UMP from winning the presidential and parliamentary elections in 1988, despite the PS' unpopularity after its attacks on workers living standards during its “austerity turn” of 1982-1983.

In order to divert workers' discontent, successive governments adopted a chauvinistic, law-and-order agenda to divide the working class. When in opposition, the PS supported the UMP's reactionary policies—numerous counter reforms of state pensions, the debate on “national identity”, the banning of the veil and burqa, and the wars in Syria, Libya, in the Sahel and on the Ivory Coast. These policies shifted the political atmosphere further to the right, facilitating the

FN's rise.

Currently, after 18 months in office, the PS is detested for its austerity measures, destruction of jobs, and the war it tried to start in Syria despite the population's overwhelming opposition. President Hollande is the most unpopular president under France's 5th Republic. This also affects the pseudo-left parties, such as the Left Front and the New Anti-capitalist party (NPA), which called for a vote for Hollande and support the PS government.

To contain rising social discontent, the PS resorts to provocations, fanning law-and-order phobias and encouraging police intimidation of Muslims in working class neighbourhoods. Some PS elected officials, such as the Marseille's 15th district Senator Samia Ghali, propose calling in the army to occupy poorer districts.

The UMP—caught between the FN and the PS, whose politics are lurching to the right—has chosen to move closer to the FN, trying to differentiate itself from the PS and present itself as the main opposition party. The FN leader, Marine Le Pen, described this dynamic by referring to the FN as “the centre of gravity of French politics.”

This reflects the extremely advanced decay of the political establishment—not only France's governing parties, but also the petty-bourgeois parties on the PS' “left” periphery and their allies in the union bureaucracy. Their pro-capitalist perspective for opposing the FN by supporting various bourgeois parties has proven to be utterly bankrupt.

A critical experience was that of the 2002 presidential elections. Wide layers of youth and workers demonstrated their anger at seeing FN candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen in the second round of the election, after the elimination of the unpopular PS candidate Lionel Jospin. Le Pen faced the Gaullist candidate, Jacques Chirac.

At the time, the WSWS called for a boycott of the election, explaining to Lutte Ouvrière (Workers Struggle, LO), the LCR (Revolutionary Communist League) and the PT (Workers Party): “Why a boycott? Because it is necessary to deny any legitimacy to this fraudulent election; because it is necessary to establish an independent political line for the working class; because an active and aggressive boycott would create the best conditions for the political struggles that will arise in the aftermath of the elections. A boycott, called

for and campaigned for aggressively by your three parties, would have a far different character than individual abstention. It would serve to politically educate the masses, and especially the young people who have been set into motion by the shock of Le Pen's success in the first round.”

These petty-bourgeois organisations of the “extreme left” opposed an independent movement of the working class, preferring instead to join the “Republican barrier” to Le Pen by backing Chirac's candidacy or, in LO's case, a passive abstention.

This position endowed Chirac with a democratic and political legitimacy. He was able to unite the French parliamentary right within a new party, the UMP. It pursued anti-working class and Islamophobic policies, opening the way to the FN with the complicity of the bourgeois “left” parties. A decade later, while Marine Le Pen continues her rise in the opinion polls, the bankruptcy of their perspective as a means to halt the FN's rise is plainly evident.

Only an independent mobilisation of the working class against the PS and the petit bourgeois “left” organisations can put an end to the growth of the extreme right. Bitter Experience shows that the working class cannot delude itself with illusions in bourgeois and petty-bourgeois parties which, in France and elsewhere, have accompanied a political downward spiral towards austerity, fascism and war.



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