

French neo-fascists win Brignoles local by-election

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On Sunday neo-fascist National Front (FN) candidate Laurent Lopez won in the *cantonal* local district election in Brignoles, 90 kilometres east of Marseille, dealing a humiliating blow to the ruling Socialist Party (PS) of President François Hollande.

With the PS continuing to collapse in the polls due to the unpopularity of Hollande's wars and austerity measures, the Brignoles by-election was seen as foreshadowing the PS' likely defeat in next spring's municipal elections.

Lopez won 54 percent of the vote, against 46 percent for Catherine Delzers of the conservative Union for a Popular Movement (UMP), in a town long dominated politically by the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF).

Lopez came in first in the initial round of voting October 6, receiving 40.4 percent of the vote in an election in which 66.65 percent of the town's 20,728 registered voters abstained. PCF candidate Laurent Carratala, supported by the PS and the petty-bourgeois "left", finished a humiliating third, with 14.6 percent, and was eliminated from the second round.

This created a wave of consternation on the bourgeois "left", which appealed for a "Republican Front" of all the other parties to "block the road to the FN"—thus endorsing the UMP candidate. Brignoles voters sent a clear signal that France's traditional parties of rule are being profoundly discredited. On a somewhat higher turnout of 45 percent of the electorate in the second round, they gave Lopez a majority.

Lopez' victory in Brignolles is clearly part of a broader trend of rising FN support. Polls last week in *Le Nouvel Observateur* showed it to be gaining ground in voting intentions for the municipal election next March and European elections in June. In two separate polls, 24 percent of the electorate said they would vote FN, giving it the lead over all the other parties in terms of voting intentions.

The PS is down to 19 percent from 21 percent. Although much of the FN's support has traditionally come from disaffected right-wing UMP voters, it is now gaining support from disillusioned PS voters. The PS has lost 11 percent of its votes since the 2012 presidential election to the FN, according to the same poll.

The PCF and its ally within the Left Front, Left Party (PG) leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon, sought to put all blame for the defeat at Hollande's doorstep. In an editorial, the Stalinist newspaper *l'Humanité* admitted that Carratala's defeat was connected to "working people's abstention—very high amongst the left—which penalised a government policy of taking from the poor and giving to the rich".

Mélenchon blamed the Brignoles defeat solely on Hollande's austerity policies. "The FN prospers from the resignation and disorganisation, because the main source of its votes is at the presidential palace", he said.

This is a cynical attempt to evade their own responsibility: the PCF and PG have consistently supported the Socialist Party, calling for Hollande's election and trying to promote illusions that the latter could be pressured to adopt "radical" policies. They have done everything in their power to block an independent movement of the working class against Hollande and behead any leftward movement of the workers against capitalist rule.

The Brignoles by-election is yet another demonstration of the political bankruptcy of the "Republican Front" call, which seeks to tie the working class to the right, and of the entire bourgeois "left". It shows that only a politically independent movement of the working class directed against the PS and its pseudo-left supporters can block the FN's rise.

The "Republican Front" call amounts to an endorsement of the right-wing UMP, even as top UMP officials such as ex-prime minister François Fillon explore

possible political alliances with the FN. (See: French Gaullist UMP party moves closer to neo-fascist National Front)

The reactionary policies of the bourgeois “left” parties make them increasingly difficult to distinguish politically from the FN for substantial layers of the population. The Hollande administration—like social-democratic governments of Greek premier George Papandreou, Spanish premier José Luis Zapatero and German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder—has carried out deep austerity measures attacking the working class.

Hollande adopted a warmongering position on Syria, backed with varying degrees of explicitness by the PCF and the petty-bourgeois New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA). Moreover, with the poisonous anti-Roma and anti-Muslim policies of PS Interior Minister Manuel Valls—designed to win over sections of the FN electorate—the PS’ policies are ever more openly based on chauvinist and racist conceptions promoted by the FN.

Carried along by the deepening crisis of global capitalism, the politics of the entire French political establishment increasingly have a neo-fascistic character.

Amid rising working class opposition to the PS, the PCF Stalinists are setting up joint slates of candidates with the PS. The PCF, in long-term decline, depends on the PS for its political survival, hoping to save its 6,000 local elected officials by maintaining its alliance with the PS on the basis of supporting PS austerity measures while dishonestly issuing mild criticisms of them.

NPA spokesman Olivier Besancenot formally declined to join the “Republican Front” to try and elect the UMP in Brignoles, unlike his support for UMP President Chirac in 2002. Nonetheless, he is promoting his alliance with the PS and PCF in public “unity meetings”. Besancenot made it absolutely clear that the PS can be assured of its support in elections where it faces a runoff with the FN.



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