

French government vows deep attacks on the working class

Kumaran Ira
3 April 2014

As the administration of President François Hollande named the ministers in France's new cabinet, incoming Prime Minister Manuel Valls pledged to intensify Hollande's austerity measures against the working class.

The cabinet reshuffle came after Hollande's Socialist Party (PS) suffered a humiliating defeat in Sunday's municipal elections, losing a record 151 cities of over 10,000 inhabitants. The neo-fascist National Front (FN), in contrast, won a record victory. It won 15 cities and obtained over 1,200 municipal councillor positions.

Valls' half-hour prime-time interview last night on TF1 television showed that the PS is responding to its defeat with a further shift to the right, appealing to pro-FN sentiment while pledging to implement free-market policies to benefit the banks.

"Cutting deficits, there is no other choice; it's a question of credibility for France. Our debt, we must control it, otherwise we will lose our national sovereignty," Valls said.

He pledged to implement Hollande's so-called Responsibility Pact—a package of social cuts including €50 billion in spending cuts, €20 billion in corporate tax breaks, and an estimated €10 billion in cuts to employers' contributions to family benefits.

While intensifying attacks against the working class, the PS government is trying to cultivate far-right sentiment with chauvinist appeals. Born to a Spanish family, Valls boasted of his pride of being French and criticized globalization, noting that many companies had shifted production out of France as a result.

He blamed the devastation of France's northern industrial regions on "globalization," trying to hide the fact that it was PS that ruled the area for decades and oversaw the final mine closures in the 1980s, during the presidency of the PS' François Mitterrand. By inciting

chauvinism and hatred of foreign enterprises, Valls is seeking to divide the international working class and favouring the rise of the FN.

Other prominent PS officials also openly advocated ruthless austerity measures, far surpassing what Hollande has implemented so far. "[Outgoing Prime Minister] Jean-Marc Ayrault may not be the only one responsible, but the time has come for shock therapy," PS lawmaker Julien Dray told Europe1 radio. "The time has come to give the government a new profile."

Dray's use of the term "shock therapy"—typically reserved for the type of social devastation imposed on the Soviet working class during capitalist restoration in the 1990s, or EU austerity policies in Greece—is a warning to the working class.

The financial press noted that the cabinet reshuffle aimed to show the European Union and the financial markets that France will speed up spending cuts and structural reforms in order to hand out public funds to banks and big business.

Bloomberg cited Antonio Barroso, an analyst at Teneo Intelligence in London: "Hollande is sending a message that France will respect its engagements and that it's still committed to fiscal consolidation and incremental reform ... By appointing Valls, he guarantees that the government will keep that line."

Valls is widely seen as the most openly right-wing, free-market figure in the PS. He has called for an end to the 35-hour work week, increasing the retirement age, and tough policies against immigrants. In 2010, he said the EU should control national budgets.

BNP Paribas economist Dominique Barbet said: "Although he has limited government experience, Manuel Valls is the right man, with natural authority, to lead a government through the tough period of faster implementation of structural reforms and spending

cuts.”

The sixteen ministers in the new government are chosen to symbolize this right-wing line. They include Hollande’s former partner, defeated 2007 PS presidential candidate Ségolène Royal, and François Rebsamen, the mayor of Dijon.

Royal will serve as environment minister. In her 2007 presidential campaign, Royal advocated free market and law-and-order policies, advocating sending youth offenders to the army for boot-camp type rehabilitation. She boasted that she was the best candidate to prevent the eruption of social struggles, calling for “a calmed-down France.” She supported Valls’ decision to expel 15-year-old Roma schoolgirl Leonarda Dibrani in January.

Rebsamen—the co-director of Royal’s 2007 election campaign who, as a specialist of security issues, strongly supports mass video surveillance—was appointed as minister for employment and social dialogue.

Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius, and Justice Minister Christine Taubira all kept their posts. Finance Minister Pierre Moscovici left the government, with former Labor Minister Michel Sapin replacing him. Arnaud Montebourg is becoming Economy Minister.

Valls appointed Benoît Hamon, a former student politician who occasionally postures as a self-styled “left” of the PS, as education minister. His task, as was openly acknowledged in the press, is to serve as a “left” fig-leaf for the right-wing policies of the Valls government.

Thus *Le Monde* wrote, “Why Benoît Hamon? The new prime minister, Manuel Valls, who is criticized by his peers for being too far to the right, needed a left cover in his team.”

After participating in the Ayrault government, the Greens left the government, refusing to serve under Valls—attempting to distance themselves from it to avoid being discredited by its far-right policies.

The appointment of Valls and the inclusion of right-wing figures like Royal and Rebsamen in his government underline the bankruptcy of pseudo-left groups like the New Anti-capitalist Party and the Left Front that supported Hollande’s election. These organisations claimed that supporting the PS was the only way to block the rise of the FN.

In fact, as the Valls government intensifies austerity policies and makes law-and-order appeals, the main beneficiary within the political establishment will again be the FN. This underscores that only the independent mobilization of the working class against the entire political establishment can halt the rise of neo-fascism in France.

The Left Front’s Jean-Luc Mélenchon reacted to Valls’ nomination on Monday by worrying that the appointment of such a nakedly right-wing figure will provoke opposition from workers and youth, on the left of the PS and its pseudo-left satellites like the Left Front.

He criticized Hollande for “responding to an electoral disaster by committing political suicide.” He added, “Hollande did not understand the message that the electorate sent him yesterday. Manuel Valls is the greatest common divisor of the left.”

The major concern of Mélenchon and of the entire pseudo-left is that opposition in the working class to the reactionary policies and the increasingly fascistic drift of the PS will threaten the capitalist order that they defend.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact