

France's new government: A political turning point for Europe

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The appointment of Manuel Valls as the new French prime minister is part of a sharp turn to the right by the political elites throughout Europe. President François Hollande has reacted to the defeat of his Socialist Party (PS) in municipal elections by intensifying his war on the working class and making chauvinist appeals that will strengthen the neo-fascist National Front (FN).

Valls' mission consists of implementing the most extensive social cuts and labour market counter-reforms in France's history. As interior minister, Valls established his credentials for carrying out this task by promoting a free market agenda combined with law-and-order policies and ruthless attacks on refugees and Roma. He is alternately called the "French Blair," the "French Schröder" and the "left-wing Sarkozy."

The €50 billion in budget cuts to be imposed by 2017 announced by his predecessor, Jean-Marc Ayrault, are just the beginning. The financial markets and their executive organs, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Union Commission, are demanding even deeper cuts.

Public spending is currently running at 56 percent of France's gross domestic product (GDP), compared to 45 percent in Germany. To reach the German level, France would have to cut its public expenditure by €200 billion annually. At the same time, big business is demanding radical cuts in wages and sweeping attacks on working conditions to reduce France's €60 billion trade deficit.

The implementation of such a programme by a PS government is grist for the mill of the FN, which made considerable gains in the municipal elections. FN leader Marine Le Pen will profit from Valls' policies in two regards: his social attacks will allow her to pose as the representative of ordinary people and his tirades against immigrants will make her own racism seem unremarkable.

For Hollande, the PS and the French ruling class, the

strengthening of the FN is not an unwanted side effect, but a consciously pursued political goal. Valls is preparing attacks on the working class that cannot be carried through on the basis of democratic methods.

The ruling class is increasingly accommodating itself to the idea of calling upon the fascists to suppress the class struggle. Within the conservative Gaullist UMP (Union for a Popular Movement), supporters of collaboration with the FN are gaining ground, and in the ranks of the PS and its pseudo-left supporters there are not a few who are likewise prepared to do this.

This is the case not only in France. The recent events in Kiev mark a sea-change in this regard. Government leaders in Europe and the US have worked closely with the far-right party Svoboda and fascist militias to bring down the elected president and install a pro-Western government that is imposing brutal austerity measures and turning Ukraine into an outpost for the military encirclement of Russia.

The pseudo-left groups around the PS are complaining about Valls' appointment as prime minister. "The government formed by France's former top cop is a government of anti-social struggle," lamented the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA). The French Communist Party (PCF) accused the president of refusing to "consider the real situation facing the country and the scale of expectations and suffering." The Left Party (PG) complained that the new government "clearly supports a policy of austerity, is supply-side oriented, and seeks the destruction of what remains of France's welfare state."

This whining serves to cover their own tracks. These parties and their predecessors have supported the PS for decades, collaborating with it and helping to get it elected—and will continue to do so. They have focused their efforts on preventing the working class from constructing an alternative to the PS, which is now opening the door for the fascists.

Those who know the history of the PS should not be surprised at Hollande placing Valls at the head of the government. The PS has always been committed to the interests of French finance capital. If it occasionally employed left phrases, it did so only to more effectively deceive French workers, undermine their militant traditions, and control them.

The PS was founded in 1969 in response to the general strike of May-June 1968, which shook bourgeois rule to its foundations. François Mitterrand, who took over its leadership in 1971, was a reactionary bourgeois politician. He had served in the pro-Nazi Vichy regime during World War II and played a despicable role as interior and justice minister during the Algerian war for independence, signing death warrants for Algerians fighting to end French colonial domination. As PS leader, he was supported by the PCF, which exploited its influence in the working class to foster illusions in a Mitterrand presidency.

After his election in 1981, Mitterrand took only two years to reveal his true colours. Under pressure from the financial markets, he turned to a policy of austerity. By the end of his second term, the PS had squandered its influence and the Gaullist Jacques Chirac won the presidency in 1995. Chirac had not reckoned, however, with the working class, who paralysed the country with weeks of strikes that winter.

To bring the situation under control, Chirac called early parliamentary elections, bringing the PS back into government. Over the ensuing five years, Chirac and PS Prime Minister Lionel Jospin worked together to attack the working class. Jospin became so discredited that in the 2002 presidential election he came in third behind Chirac and FN leader Jean-Marie Le Pen.

The PS could not have played this role without the support of the petty-bourgeois groups, which are falsely described in France as the “far left.” In the 1970s, they supported the electoral alliance of the Socialist and Communist parties. Under Mitterrand’s presidency, they ensured that the protests against the government remained under the control of the trade unions and came to nothing.

In the first round of the 2002 presidential election, over 10 percent of the vote went to candidates who (falsely) claimed to be Trotskyists: Arlette Laguiller of Lutte Ouvrière (Workers Struggle, LO), Olivier Besancenot of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (League of Communist Revolutionaries, LCR) and Daniel Gluckstein of the Parti des Travailleurs (Workers Party, PT). They all reacted with panic to their unexpectedly large vote and the

collapse of the PS vote.

They rejected the call by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) for a working class boycott of the second round of the presidential election between the right-wing Gaullist Chirac and the neo-fascist Le Pen. As the ICFI explained, this policy would have enabled the working class to make an independent intervention and prepare its forces to oppose the right-wing policies that would be carried out regardless of which bourgeois candidate won the run-off. Instead, the pseudo-left organizations either openly or tacitly supported Chirac, whom they portrayed as a defender of republican and democratic values and a bulwark against the rise of Le Pen and the FN.

Since then, these groups have moved further to the right. The LCR dissolved itself into the New Anti-capitalist Party and explicitly renounced its previous ties to Trotskyism. It has supported the French neo-colonial war in Libya, French imperialism’s campaign for regime-change in Syria, and the Western-backed fascist-led putsch in Ukraine. It will collaborate with Valls, and would be prepared to collaborate with Le Pen.

LO and PT are deeply embedded in the unions, which serve as the government’s most important prop in its attacks on working conditions and wages.

The French pseudo-left as a whole reacted to the appointment of Valls with a call for a “national march against austerity” to be held April 12 in Paris. This will prove just as fruitless as previous marches. The aim of this socio-political layer is to hide the lessons of the past and block the development of a politically independent movement of the working class against Valls and his government.

To oppose the fascist danger, a new party must be built that declares political war on the ruling class and all of its parties, including the PS, and provides the working class with a clear socialist and internationalist orientation. This means building a section in France of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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