

After Socialist Party government reshuffle, neo-fascists offer to rule France

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A week after the collapse of France's Socialist Party (PS) government and the formation of a new one by President François Hollande, neo-fascist National Front (FN) leader Marine Le Pen gave an extensive interview to France's conservative daily *Le Figaro*, offering to rule France.

With Hollande's approval ratings under 20 percent, he and Prime Minister Manuel Valls fired Economy Minister Arnaud Montebourg and Education Minister Benoît Hamon, who had publicly denounced Hollande's policies as being dictated by Berlin. The new Valls government, having thrown out its internal critics, is pledged to force through its austerity agenda in the face of overwhelming popular opposition.

Le Pen told *Le Figaro*, "This last-chance government of François Hollande is a government of pure provocation."

She predicted that Hollande would soon face a new government crisis and would be forced to call new legislative elections. "The political crisis we are passing through is extremely deep and can only lead to new elections," she said. "If we obtain a majority in the elections, we will face up to the responsibilities that the French people will have given us."

It is, of course, impossible to predict when the FN might obtain such a majority or form a government. While the FN came in first in this spring's European elections with 25 percent of the vote, it remains deeply unpopular, and there is deep opposition among workers in France and across Europe to the historic crimes of fascism. According to a recent IFOP poll, the FN's negative poll ratings (74 percent) are just barely under those of the PS (75 percent) and above those of the right-wing Union for a Popular Movement (67 percent).

The dominant factor in French politics is not, however, the parliamentary arithmetic of the major

bourgeois parties, but the global capitalist crisis and the deepening gulf between the international working class and the ruling elite. Economic collapse, the discrediting of the European Union's (EU) austerity agenda, and the war crisis with Russia over Ukraine stoked by Berlin and Washington—which Le Pen publicly criticized in her trips to Moscow—have shaken French capitalism to its foundations.

The decision as to whether the FN will be allowed to convert its rising influence into a position in government will depend not primarily on the voters, but on the strategic needs of French imperialism. It was principally to its strategists that Le Pen addressed her *Le Figaro* interview. She laid out a strategy of competitive devaluation of France's currency, implicitly requiring France to abandon the euro currency and the EU, in order to pursue class war against the workers at home and trade war internationally—above all, against Germany.

Le Pen gave three possible strategies to attack the working class and restore the French bourgeoisie's competitiveness. She explained, "One is to cut wages. This is called deflation of wages. It is proposed by [PS Economy Minister Emmanuel] Macron when he proposes to pay a 39-hour work week at 35 hours' wages. It is also exactly what was done in other European countries and is a main element of austerity. The second solution is to collapse social spending."

Implicitly relying on her previous calls for France to leave the euro and return to its national currency, she called for a third strategy, of inflating prices by devaluing the currency in order to cut workers' purchasing power. She said, "Finally, one can devalue the currency. I want us to use the tool of monetary policy to obtain the boost in competitiveness that we need."

The significance of such reactionary strategies for the working class was best explained by the great Marxist revolutionary Leon Trotsky during capitalism's last Great Depression.

In 1934, in “A Program of Action for France”, he wrote: “To try to emerge from the chaos in which it has plunged the country, the French bourgeoisie must first resolve the monetary problem. One section wants to do this by *inflation*, i.e., the issuing of paper money, the depreciation of wages, the raising of the cost of living, the expropriation of the petty bourgeoisie; the other by *deflation*, i.e., retrenchment on the backs of the workers (lowering of salaries and wages), extension of unemployment, ruin of the small peasant producers and the petty bourgeoisie of the towns.”

Eighty years later, Trotsky's analysis still captures the essential features of the inflationary strategy of Le Pen and the deflationary strategy adopted by Hollande.

“To choose between these two capitalist methods would be to choose between two instruments with which the exploiters are preparing to cut the throats of the workers,” Trotsky wrote. To this, Trotsky counterposed the proletariat's struggle for socialist revolution and “the complete ‘deflation’ of the privileges and profits” of the capitalists.

Le Pen's emergence as a contender for power testifies to the bankruptcy of France's political elite and the crisis of capitalist rule unleashed by the 2008 economic collapse. An international crisis with revolutionary implications is developing. Elements of the French bourgeoisie are disturbed by Germany's growing economic influence, its rehabilitation of militarism, and the risk that NATO's war drive over Ukraine will undermine Russia—French imperialism's traditional counterweight to Germany on Berlin's eastern flank.

The main political force they have found in a desperate effort to stabilize their rule is, however, an unpopular far-right party proposing to tear up all the arrangements that have underlain European capitalism for the last quarter century. If their policies of competitive devaluation meet with opposition internationally, this could unleash a downward spiral as each country sought to devalue its currency to compete on world markets—throwing global trade into chaos.

Within France, an FN government's savage attacks on workers' living standards and on democratic rights, particularly those of immigrants, would meet bitter and

explosive resistance in France's impoverished immigrant suburbs and throughout the working class.

The FN can posture as the only opposition to Hollande's austerity policies due to the rottenness of the PS and its pseudo-left satellites, like the New Anti-capitalist party and the Left Front.

Asked by *Le Figaro* whether her policies were not too left-wing, Le Pen replied by demagogically claiming that her main enemy was free-market policies, citing as an example the record of the PS since the 1981-1995 PS presidency of François Mitterrand.

She observed, “Ultra-free-marketism was put into effect by the Socialists in the 1980s with deregulation, the merging of commercial and investment banking ... The reality is that there was never a 'social-free market turn [by the PS],’ because for years France's Socialists have been advocates of this ultra-free-marketism imposed by the European Union.”

The pseudo-left parties have accommodated themselves for decades to these policies and now are seeking to block all opposition from the left to Holland's reactionary administration. They called for a Hollande vote during the 2012 presidential election, while cynically acknowledging that he would carry out “social-free market” policies. Now, they are desperately trying to suppress workers' struggles against Hollande, perpetuating a political vacuum on the left that allows the FN to continue to advance.



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