

France's new government shaken by early ministerial resignation

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10 September 2014

The newly installed government of Prime Minister Manuel Valls is already facing its first crisis, after the resignation of a minister and the publication of a book by the former first lady, Valérie Trierweiler, both of which expose the extreme fragility of the government.

The Elysée presidential palace announced the resignation of Thomas Thévenoud, the minister for foreign trade, tourism, and overseas Frenchmen, who admitted to “delays in reporting and payment” to French tax authorities.

Thévenoud was replaced by a former associate of Dominique Strauss-Kahn, Matthias Fekl, a regional secretary of the ruling Socialist Party (PS) in the Lot-et-Garonne district. Fekl had already overseen the succession of former budget minister Jérôme Cahuzac in that district. Last year, Cahuzac had resigned his post—in which he was supposedly fighting tax evasion—amid a scandal that erupted when it became clear that he was evading his own taxes and had ties to far-right circles.

Cahuzac had a secret Swiss bank account holding profits from his ventures with former members of the Union Defense Group (GUD), a violent far-right grouping some of whose members then passed into the neo-fascist National Front (FN).

The day after Thévenoud resigned, the book by Hollande's former partner appeared. The most widely cited passage was that where Trierweiler reports that Hollande dislikes poor people. According to her, he calls them “toothless people” and considers it funny.

PS ties with the far right and its undisguised disdain for the people underlie the rottenness of the French bourgeois “left.” Despite a government reshuffle to throw out certain ministers, like Arnaud Montebourg, who proposed to shift the line of the PS towards an inflationary policy more hostile to Germany, the PS is

still unable to stabilize itself. A profound crisis is shaking the entire political establishment.

François Hollande's term in office is marked by workers' rising anger with the government. According to a poll conducted for *Le Figaro*, the president and prime minister have approval ratings of only 13 and 30 percent, respectively—an all-time record low, the newspaper reports.

A recent Ifop poll on the 2017 presidential elections demonstrating the PS's collapse faced with the FN, has staggered ruling circles in France. Not only would Marine Le Pen, the FN's likely candidate, come in first in the first round with 30 percent of the vote, but if she were facing Hollande in the second round, she would beat him with 54 percent of the vote and become president of France.

The poll shows that Le Pen would lose in a second-round contest against candidates of the right-wing Union for a Popular Movement (UMP), such as former President Nicolas Sarkozy or Alain Juppé.

In an interview with *Le Monde*, Le Pen repeated the proposal she had already made to become Hollande's prime minister, if he decided to call new legislative elections.

“It will likely be a terrible confrontation with Hollande,” she predicted, adding: “Hollande, he will inaugurate flower pots and do commemorations. Besides, he loves that sort of thing. And that will be it, because constitutionally, it is the government that determines and conducts the policy of the nation. The president of the Republic will submit or resign. And I believe that he will choose the second solution, because he will not be able to tolerate the fact that the policy that will be carried out will be radically different from his own.”

Le Pen then continued by demanding attacks on

immigrant workers. If she takes power, Le Pen indicated, she would “modify the nationality code, stop immigration by making coming to France unattractive, the way David Cameron did in the United Kingdom. And we would install national preference” in domains such as hiring and social spending.

Such comments underscore the total bankruptcy of the French ruling elite. As working class anger explodes against the PS and the UMP, the alternative they are bringing forth is a neo-fascist candidate whose program is unpopular and deeply hostile to the working class.

The Valls government is calculating that it will be possible to remain in power, despite its abysmal unpopularity, by relying on the current PS majority in the National Assembly. Its survival depends on the support of sections of the PS around Montebourg, and above all the ability of corrupt pseudo-left parties and the union bureaucracy to strangle the anger of the working class.

These parties helped Hollande win the 2012 presidential elections, calling for a vote for him and claiming that it would be easier to pressure a Hollande administration to the left. In fact, the pseudo-left parties were well aware that Hollande would carry out ruthless austerity policies.

Trierweiler’s reporting of Hollande’s private mocking of the working class underscores the political dishonesty of pseudo-left parties like the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA). The PS is not a left-wing party, whatever claims to the contrary may be advanced by the pseudo-left—which is largely drawn from petty bourgeois layers who share Hollande’s contempt for the working masses.

Hollande’s speeches claiming that “my adversary is finance” and that he would tax the rich at 75 percent were all cynical lies. They could be advanced and maintained for a time only because the pseudo-left blocked the expression of opposition to the PS from the left.

The PS is hostile to the working class and to socialism. Valls had, in fact, previously proposed that the PS change its name to drop any reference to socialism. In 2009, he declared, “We must transform the functioning of the PS from top to bottom, to go beyond ourselves, changing everything: the name, because the word socialism itself is outdated; it takes us

back to conceptions of the 19th century.”

In fact, the PS wanted to present itself to the bourgeoisie as capable of imposing the policies necessary to defend the interests of finance capital. The Valls government is now a nakedly right wing government representing a parasitic financial aristocracy responsible for the impoverishment of the working class.



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