

Valls government narrowly wins confidence vote in French National Assembly

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France's National Assembly gave its support yesterday to a new government led by Prime Minister Manuel Valls, after a first, deeply unpopular Valls government collapsed on August 25.

The new government—formed by purging ministers who had criticized Valls' adoption of austerity measures agreed with the German government in the face of overwhelming popular opposition—barely survived the confidence vote. It won the vote by 269 to 244 with 53 abstentions, receiving 20 votes less than the symbolic limit of 289, which constitutes a simple majority in the 577-seat Assembly.

The vote consecrates the comprehensive breakdown of bourgeois democracy in France and of what passes for the French “left.” With the ruling Socialist Party's (PS) popularity in free fall—President François Hollande is at a historic low of 13 percent, and Valls has fallen from 34 percent during the government collapse to 22 percent today—it is pressing ahead with total contempt for the people.

The PS government, elected in 2012 with the support of pseudo-left parties such as the New Anti-capitalist Party and the Left Front, is moving to carry out unprecedented social attacks dictated by big business. These include not only the €50 billion in social cuts in President François Hollande's so-called Responsibility Pact, but massive new attacks on workers' social rights.

On Sunday, the Medef employers' federation leaked a report to the business daily *Les Echos* proposing cuts to the minimum wage (currently €9.53 per hour), eliminating all restrictions to the length of the work week, and eliminating two of France's 11 yearly public holidays.

In his speech to the National Assembly before the vote yesterday evening, Valls made militarist and anti-

immigrant appeals, adapting to the rising influence of the neo-fascist National Front (FN), and pledged to boost French companies' international competitiveness.

Valls pledged to deepen France's imperialist interventions in Ukraine, Africa, and above all in Iraq and Syria. “The world is first of all confronted with a terrorist menace of unprecedented scope and evolution,” Valls said, adding: “France—its head of state, its diplomacy, its armies—is fully mobilized to face this security threat, certainly the greatest in the beginning of the 21st century. It totally accepts its responsibilities, given to it by History and as a permanent member of the UN Security Council ... It is working on a global counterattack both inside France and outside it.”

Valls, who has already said that he believes the entire Roma ethnicity should leave France, denounced France's immigration policy as a total failure: “Thirty years during which we pursued a policy of integration, choosing to treat populations according to their origins, proved to be a dead end. These refugees of the Republic all try as best they can to find protection that we no longer know how to give them. And I believe that this is where our main struggle should be!”

Demanding “order and rules,” Valls added: “Our policemen, military police, and judges must work together to enforce them and make sure they are respected.”

He pledged to continue with social cuts, cynically adding: “Reforming France does not mean breaking our social model.”

In fact, the PS—France's main “left” party of rule since the general strike of 1968, to which the country's pseudo-left parties have oriented themselves for decades—is politically collapsing as it tries to unify

itself on a line of deep austerity and war.

The PS “dissidents” who had criticized Valls, in line with anti-German comments by recently-fired ministers Arnaud Montebourg and Benoit Hamon, capitulated and backed the government. The right-wing Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) voted against, while the Left Front and Green deputies abstained.

Valls apparently threatened PS “dissidents” that if they did not vote for him, they would lose their positions and the FN would come to power. According to *Le Monde*, he also reportedly told his associates: “If in three to six months the situation has not reversed itself, we are screwed.”

In the event, the bulk of the approximately 100 PS “dissidents” in the Assembly voted confidence in the government, though 31 abstained. “I do not agree with the policy that is being carried out,” explained PS “dissident” Pascal Cherki in one typical comment, “but I do not want to make the government fall. I am not a member of the opposition.”

While the PS government has briefly stabilized itself, relying on the political Maginot Line formed by the large PS majority elected in the 2012 legislative elections, it is clear that it remains mired in a deep political crisis for which it has no solutions.

Staggered by escalating global wars and the contracting European economy, the government cannot control the escalating international tensions, such as those between Germany and France, or the increasing social anger in the working class. Weak and deeply unpopular, it is setting the stage for an explosive confrontation with the working class—if it is not overtaken first by a major global crisis, including one that it may have provoked itself through its ever more warlike foreign policy.

Marine Le Pen, the leader of the neo-fascist FN, issued a communiqué last night, responding to Valls’ speech by again attacking Germany and demagogically posing as the alternative to France’s discredited political establishment.

Denouncing “the European and German stranglehold that is murdering France” and the “empty, even ridiculous” speech given by Valls, she said: “This government will soon fall, it will not be strong enough, as the prime minister himself admitted, to deal with the disastrous results that are coming. The return to the people through early legislative elections will then

impose itself, this will come in only a few months.”

Leading figures in the French ruling elite are taking Le Pen’s threats increasingly seriously. They fear that the FN could completely discredit French capitalism, should the Valls government fall and the FN somehow take on a major role in government.

Yesterday, François Fillon, a former prime minister and leading official in the right-wing UMP, published an extraordinary editorial in the generally pro-PS daily *Le Monde*, titled “Hollande has a last chance before total shipwreck.” Fillon’s only proposed solution, however, was a PS-UMP alliance to push through social cuts despised by the French people.

He wrote, “Prime Minister Manuel Valls will try in a speech to obtain confidence in his policy to save face for a government in utter ruin. Doubtless the government will obtain confidence of its legislative majority, but it will be derisory given the generalized hostility in the country. France is fully in crisis, and the risk of a breakdown of its social or democratic system cannot be excluded. Manuel Valls has claimed that the far right is ‘on the verge of taking power.’ Whose fault is that, if not that of the head of state who, by his indecision and his errors, has tilted the Republic into a depression?”

Calling for deep social cuts worked out with the “Republican opposition,” that is the UMP, Fillon added: “Our nation is not doomed. It is our system that is. But a system can be changed. Thanks to its resources, our country can turn things around in two years, stand up in five, and in ten years become the leading European power. This is my objective, it is attainable if we are decided to transform France.”

The fact that the alternatives coming forward from the ruling elite are unpopular shock therapy or the demagoguery of a neo-fascist testify to the utter bankruptcy of French capitalism.



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