

# French President Hollande's mid-term TV appearance: No shift in right-wing policies

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French president François Hollande made a 90-minute appearance on TF1 television last night on a special show titled “Live with the French People,” billed as a last-ditch attempt to halt the collapse of his presidency, which threatens to bring down Hollande’s Socialist Party (PS) with him.

The appearance came at precisely the middle of Hollande’s five-year term, with 5 million people on unemployment rolls in France and economic forecasts continuing to worsen, and Hollande’s own approval ratings collapsing to 12 percent. His jobs policy has only a 3 percent approval rating. This makes Hollande far and away France’s most unpopular president since General Charles de Gaulle created the office in 1958.

Nonetheless, Hollande signalled that there will be no change of course from his pro-business, pro-war agenda. Pressed by presenters to admit to errors that he could use to claim that he was identifying his mistakes and learning from them, Hollande refused, saying only that he wished that unemployment were not so high.

Instead, he unabashedly laid out his right-wing views. He hailed businesses as the engines of economic growth, praised the social cuts of Germany’s former social-democratic chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and his own Responsibility Pact, with its €50 billion of social cuts, and pledged to continue France’s wars in Africa.

Hollande bluntly acknowledged that his unpopularity could lead to a total wipe-out of the PS in the upcoming spring 2017 presidential elections, setting up—as on April 21, 2002—a run-off between the conservatives and the neo-fascist National Front (FN). “April 21 can happen again,” he said.

Significantly, Hollande also felt compelled to address the possibility that the FN could in fact come to power outright. “France would be seen as a country leaving

Europe,” he stated, adding, “If Europe does not change, there is a risk of populism.” Nonetheless, he did not indicate that he would in any way change the main lines of his policies.

Instead, the bulk of Hollande’s TV appearance was devoted to interviews with four citizens who discussed their economic difficulties with Hollande. TF1 prepared a brief video presentation of each person; all had clearly been carefully studied and vetted.

There was an unemployed woman of 60 who started work at 16 but cannot retire because, after Hollande’s latest pension cut, she is just short of having worked the required number of trimesters to pay into the national pension plan; the head of a mid-sized manufacturing firm, demanding lower taxes and worried that workers no longer trust the trade unions; an unemployed law graduate from north Marseille; and a working mom of three children in a rural area, fighting with the Education Ministry to keep open the junior high school her children are slated to attend.

In a series of brief exchanges, Hollande announced new programs that would address their particular problems. The near-retiree had started work early enough that she could use a new short-term work scheme to work a couple of years and qualify for retirement. Hollande promised new tax cuts; he announced a further 16,000 new youth jobs, and he promised to make the working mom’s junior high the beneficiary of a new subsidy to promote IT literacy.

This demagogic exercise was intended to present Hollande as “listening to the French people,” even though the measures he is proposing are totally inadequate to deal with mass unemployment, rising poverty among French senior citizens, and collapsing public services in rural areas, caused in no small measure by Hollande’s own policies.

Significantly, given the multiple conflicts and war crises in which France is engaged—in Africa, in Syria and Iraq, and with NATO against Russia over Ukraine—Hollande also held out the possibility that France might restart compulsory public service for young men and women, nearly a decade after ending compulsory military service for men. He indicated that he would likely submit such a policy to public approval through a referendum.

Hollande's performance testifies to the bankruptcy of the PS and the French "left" establishment. A surreal and dangerous situation has emerged, where the entire bourgeois "left's" support for the PS, whose pro-business policies are indistinguishable from those of the right-wing Union for a Popular Movement (UMP), has allowed the FN to pose as France's only opposition party.

Hollande's press conference constitutes an indictment of the support given to Hollande by pseudo-left parties such as the Pabloite New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) and the Left Front of Jean-Luc Mélenchon during the run-off of the 2012 presidential elections.

"The watchword is getting rid of [right-wing incumbent Nicolas] Sarkozy," NPA presidential candidate Philippe Poutou declared to justify his call for a Hollande vote in the 2012 run-off, "and the tool for this is Hollande."

In fact, it was the NPA that served as a tool of Hollande—whose policies were if anything to the right of those pursued by Sarkozy—and thus of the financial aristocracy, by spreading illusions that this reactionary politician could be "pressured" to carry out progressive policies.

Hollande's press conference illustrates the class gulf separating France's bourgeois "left" and pseudo-left parties from the explosive social anger in the working class that is building against the PS. Even as the disintegration of the economy and of the PS intensifies, and the FN increases its vote, the PS and its pseudo-left allies have nothing to offer but more wars, free-market policies, and attacks on working people.



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