

France: Neo-fascists defeat ruling Socialist Party in legislative elections

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On December 7, the Socialist Party (PS) was eliminated in the first round of the partial legislative elections in the city of Troyes. This humiliating defeat provoked no public comment from President François Hollande, Prime Minister Manuel Valls, or PS ministers and legislators.

Abstention reached a record level of 75.37 percent. Less than one quarter of voters showed up to the polls, with 16,000 votes out of 66,000 registered voters.

The election was provoked by the election to the Senate this September of Troyes mayor François Baroin, a deputy and former minister of the right-wing Union for a Popular Movement (UMP). He therefore had to give up his deputy's seat in the National Assembly. Gérard Menuel, the financial officer at Troyes town hall who served as Baroin's substitute, led the first round with 40.76 percent of votes cast.

With 27.64 percent of the vote, Bruno Subtil, the candidate of the neo-fascist National Front (FN), qualified for the second round and improved the FN's score by 10 percent compared to the last elections in 2012.

The vote for the PS candidate, Olivier Girardin, fell almost by half. Indeed, he received only 14.69 percent of the vote—barely more than the combined vote of the Communist Party-dominated Left Front, the Greens, and the New Deal party (14.4 percent combined).

The silence of Hollande and the PS in the face of this new disavowal by the electorate underscores the growing confusion of the PS and its pseudo-left supporters, such as the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA), faced with the PS' collapse. Since the beginning of the year, the PS has lost badly in the March municipal elections and the May European elections. In the municipal elections, the PS lost 30,000 of its 60,000 elected officials.

With 13.98 percent of the vote, the PS got its worst-ever score in the European elections. In metropolitan France's 96 departments, it led the vote in only two, Haute-Vienne and Corrèze, and was often beaten by both the UMP and the FN elsewhere.

In recent months, the PS has been eliminated in the first round of several partial legislative elections, including in Valenciennes and Villeneuve-sur-Lot.

In Troyes, a PS member close to former Education Minister Benoît Hamon did not hide his frustration: "We have gone from a logic of deception and disenchantment to one of armed despair. The population believes that politicians in general, and those in power in particular, do not want to do anything for them. There is no orientation or meaning given to what we are doing."

Confronted with these electoral defeats, Hollande and his government are continuing to hand over massive sums to big business. They signed this year the Responsibility Pact with Pierre Gattaz, leader of the Medef employers' federation, guaranteeing them over €40 billion in cuts to social spending cuts and loans supposedly to create jobs.

The loss of these €40 billion to the state budget comes on top of billions in budget cuts demanded by the European Commission in the name of the European Union's Maastricht Accords, which limits national budget deficits to 3 percent of GDP. The 2015 budget containing all these cuts was voted by the PS on November 14. Cuts fall hardest on health spending and family benefits.

Last week, Economy Minister Emmanuel Macron announced a new law containing multiple measures to introduce more flexibility and undermine working conditions in numerous job categories. He declared his goal was to destroy "the three ills of France: mistrust,

complexity, and corporatism,” which are code words to indicate opposition to the destruction of the social rights of the working class and middle classes.

Last week, as the PS prepared its upcoming congress next year, delegates met in so-called “Estates General” in a Paris gymnasium as approximately 200 people protested outside. The PS’ security service called upon the CRS riot police to come and “protect” the delegates as they left the building from a group of unemployed and part-time-employed protesters.

The PS delegates left the gymnasium under mocking shouts of “PS, Medef, same struggle!”

The policies of Hollande, his government, and the PS to benefit the financial aristocracy are also the responsibility of pseudo-left parties like the NPA and the Left Front. Having given Hollande carte blanche with a call for a PS vote in the second round of the 2012 presidential elections—even though they admitted that Hollande would carry out austerity policies—they are politically implicated by his reactionary record.

It is the political bankruptcy of these parties that explains why growing popular discontent, which is now taking on explosive dimensions, finds distorted expression in official public life through mass abstention and a protest vote for the FN.



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