

Calls for “primary of the left” offer political cover to French ruling party

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The French daily *Libération* published yesterday an appeal for a “primary of the left” issued by a group of political, intellectual and artistic figures from Green and social-democratic circles. The best-known is the Green politician and former May-June 1968 student protester, Daniel Cohn-Bendit. There is a matching request to sign a petition in favor of the “primary of the left.”

This initiative emerges from the campaign for the 2017 presidential and legislative elections, already well underway, amid a state of emergency imposed by the ruling Socialist Party (PS) and sharpening social tensions. The neo-fascist National Front (FN) is expected to make it to the second round of the presidential election and might even win.

The idea of a single primary for all the official “left” parties had already been mooted last November by a group around Cohn-Bendit, which declared it was ready to participate. The campaign took shape after the FN’s record performance in the December regional elections and above all since President François Hollande proposed the policy of destitution of nationality for those convicted of terror-related crimes. This measure, drawn from the neo-fascist program, provoked conflicts inside the PS and among its political satellites.

The appeal published in *Libération* won support from the Greens and parts of the Left Front (an alliance of the Stalinist Communist Party, PS split-offs, and Pabloite groups). The so-called “rebels” inside the PS did not oppose it, but the rest of the PS did. It was abundantly discussed in the press and media, some of whom portrayed it as an initiative opposed to the PS government. Some of the best-publicized signatories were economist Thomas Piketty, writer Marie Depleschin, Europe Ecology The Greens (EELV) deputy Yannick Jadot, and sociologist Michel

Wieviorka.

It is in fact an operation launched by the forces that have spent decades in the PS’ periphery, and who fear that an open embrace of far-right policies by the PS could discredit the wars, European Union (EU) austerity policies, and attacks on democratic rights carried out by Hollande.

Speaking to France Inter, Marie Depleschin said, “There are people who come out with far-right proposals as if they were the solution, but being progressive means trying to find solutions that one did not find in the camp of social reaction.”

In fact, the forces promoting the “primary of the left” are also in the camp of social reaction. They plan no break with the PS’ reactionary policies. *Libération’s* appeal opposes neither social austerity nor the EU, nor a return to power by the PS on its current program. Rather, it calls for a cynical facelift to the PS and its periphery: “Primary’ means ‘renewed colors’ for the left and ecology. ... We know one thing: the coming to power of the National Front would be a catastrophe, and the coming to power of The [right-wing] Republicans would not get us out of the blind alley.”

The primary’s supporters fear a discrediting of the state institutions and want to try to mobilize support for them: “We will not change the Republic by 2017, and everything hangs on the central election, the presidentials. This ... is the key question today, and we want the citizens to reappropriate it for themselves.”

In fact, until mid-2014, EELV was imposing austerity from within the Hollande administration, and it continued to support the PS’ pro-EU policy after leaving the government. Last May, Cohn-Bendit told Green members of the European Parliament, as the EU attacked the Greek working class, to back the conservative Jean-Claude Juncker, one of the main

architects of these attacks, for the presidency of the European Commission. Cohn-Bendit praised Juncker's candidacy as a way to "make European democracy progress."

In November, while Cohn-Bendit considered running in the "primary of the left," he advised Hollande to also back a primary, to "re-legitimise" himself.

According to a BFM-TV poll, "78 percent of left-wing voters declare they are favorable to holding a primary election in order to determine who will be the candidate in the 2017 presidential campaign ... They consider that [Prime Minister] Manuel Valls has the best chance to win the next presidential elections. Behind the Prime Minister, which has 29 percent support, there is the mayor of Lille [Martine Aubry] with 22 percent of left-wing voters, in front of François Hollande with 19 percent."

The political profile of the main signatories underscores the character of the agenda they are defending. One is Romain Goupil, a former member of the Pabloite LCR (precursor of today's New Anti-capitalist Party). He is a prominent supporter within artistic circles of most of the imperialist wars waged in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa in the last quarter century.

Another signatory is Raphael Glucksmann, a writer and son of the anti-Communist "new philosopher" André Glucksmann. Resolutely pro-EU, he was from 2005 to 2013 an advisor of former pro-NATO Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili and the husband of Saakashvili's justice minister, Eka Zguladze. He backed the Maidan demonstrations in Kiev which led to a fascist-led coup in Ukraine in February 2014, and since December his wife is vice-minister of the interior in the far-right government in Ukraine.

Such figures criticise Hollande not because he is adopting policies taken from the far right, which they could themselves carry out, but rather because he is doing it too openly and therefore risks provoking a movement of opposition to the PS from its left.

Indeed, the policy of the PS and the Hollande government over the last year has been to try to rally the public around the legitimisation of the far right. Having invited FN leader Marine Le Pen to the Elysée presidential palace after the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks last January, Hollande is now adopting the destitution of nationality policy, previously employed by the Nazi-

collaborationist Vichy regime as it persecuted and tried to exterminate the Jewish people during World War II.

As the WSWS wrote after the unprecedented conviction of French workers striking at Goodyear, "The French capitalist class was compelled to inscribe basic social rights such as the right to strike in the post-World War II constitution as a pledge never to return to the crimes committed by Vichy. As it tears up its commitments to maintain basic social rights and turns to authoritarian forms of rule, driven by intractable financial and economic contradictions, the ruling class moves to legitimize the FN and adopt policies drawn from the legal arsenal of 20th Century fascism."

The resort to the destitution of nationality policy underscores the political bankruptcy of the PS, the main political formation that emerged after the student protests and general strike of May-June 1968, which was actively supported by the radicalized petty-bourgeoisie of that period.

If the defensive maneuver of the advocates of a "primary of the left" is an attempt to repair the PS' tattered "left" credentials to allow it to pursue the policies of war and EU austerity under different colors, it also aims to burnish the image of the entire post-1968 "left" establishment. They are thus trying to block any movement that could emerge to challenge Hollande's reactionary policies from the left.



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