

Public split in French Socialist Party over state of emergency

Alex Lantier**29 February 2016**

Amid rising tensions in Europe and popular anger with the draconian austerity policies Paris is imposing under the state of emergency, factional warfare has erupted inside the ruling Socialist Party (PS). Last Thursday, Lille mayor and 2012 presidential hopeful Martine Aubry published a full-page commentary in *Le Monde*, co-signed with a number of PS legislators and Daniel Cohn-Bendit of the German Green Party, criticizing President François Hollande's policies.

Aubry signaled her support for the general line of the PS' reactionary policies. She was silent on the wars being waged by NATO, said that she "approved the state of emergency," and insisted that, on social and labor issues, the PS must impose "big reforms." Rather, her article, titled "What is being prepared is the lasting weakening of France," called for a tactical shift, attacking Hollande's policies as posing a fundamental threat to France and to the PS.

"What threatens is no longer just simply the failure of the current presidential term, but the lasting weakening of France and quite evidently of the left, if we do not stop the downward spiral in which we are being dragged," she wrote. She criticized Hollande's planned Labor Code reform, his proposal to deprive those convicted of various offenses of French nationality, and Premier Manuel Valls' criticisms of German refugee policy at the recent Munich Security Conference. There, Valls called for a more restrictive refugee policy and made overtures to Moscow.

Aubry's criticisms—coming amid anger among youth and workers over the state of emergency and a reform to the Labor Code allowing companies to negotiate draconian changes in contracts with the unions and speed up mass sackings—led to a limited climb-down from the PS government.

Economy Minister Emmanuel Macron pledged to

continue negotiating some aspects of the Labor Code reform with the trade unions: "We are at a point in the presidential term where we cannot just brutalize everything, because that risks ending debate for a long time without having resolved all the problems."

The significance of Aubry's letter is not, however, in whatever minor modifications the unions work out on the Labor Code reform, with whose basic principle—their right to negotiate contracts violating the Labor Code—they have already signaled their agreement. Rather, her letter points to escalating geo-strategic divisions inside Europe, and particularly Aubry's fear that Hollande will shatter the PS, which has ever since its foundation shortly after the 1968 general strike been one of France's main parties of government.

On Valls' attack against Berlin, Aubry joined a number of commentators who have said that his apparent consideration of a Franco-Russian axis aimed at Germany on the refugee issue, echoing the alliance structure that developed in Europe in the lead-up to World War I, was a serious mistake. Writing in *The Guardian* shortly after the conference, former *Le Monde* editor Natalie Nougayrède declared: "Paris would do well to rebuild bridges with Berlin—and fast. Merkel has kept silent on this pitiful episode, but don't think the damage isn't real."

Aubry echoed these remarks, declaring, "Last week, there was the wound inflicted by the indecent speech at Munich on refugees. Claiming a liberty of tone does not excuse everything. No, Mr prime minister, Angela Merkel is not naive. ... France's mission is not to erect walls but to build bridges."

The bulk of Aubry's comments were, however, addressed to fear that Hollande could do irreparable damage to European social-democracy and in particular

to the PS. By relying on a lasting state of emergency, appealing to neo-fascist sentiment, and imposing deep austerity, the PS is raising before masses of working people the utter fraudulence of its claim that it has anything to do with socialism.

Without referring to the record of the deprivation of nationality policy—which French fascist authorities at Vichy used during World War II against Jews in Occupied France, before they were deported to death camps across Europe—Aubry criticized Hollande’s resort to it. She indicated that a section of the PS, of its parliamentary allies, and even of explicitly right-wing parties did not feel they could support the proposed constitutional amendment adopting the policy.

She wrote, “Put in the hands of future governments with bad intentions, it opens the way to all sorts of abuse. Going to the Congress at Versailles under these conditions would fracture the left and even the democratic camp. Let us avoid this. To the deprivation of nationality, let us substitute a sentence of deprivation of citizenship or of national degradation, specified by law, applicable to all terrorists, whatever their origins.”

She warned that the Labor Code reform had provoked “not disappointment but anger,” and that the Hollande administration’s attempt to falsely present it as a job creation measure would backfire: “Workers will face permanent blackmail, and companies will face distorted competition … [And] who will you convince that this will help create jobs? Slashing protections for workers against sackings will certainly produce more sackings!”

Having assembled this fairly devastating summary of the reactionary and treacherous role of her own party, Aubry warned: “Values, ambitions on social issues, universal human rights, the balance of powers—what will remain of the ideals of socialism when, day after day, its basic principles and foundations will have been undermined?”

In fact, what Aubry’s comments show is that the conception of socialism that predominated for decades in official circles in France and much of Europe—that is, as policies carried out under capitalism by bourgeois politicians hostile to the working class—is a fraud and a lie. The more profound character of the political forces that came together to form the PS in the late 1960s is being exposed.

The PS assembled figures of the old bourgeois Radical Party tied to the Vichy regime, like the first PS

President François Mitterrand; social-Catholic elements like Aubry’s father Jacques Delors; figures of the old social-democratic French Section of the Workers International (SFIO) discredited by their war in Algeria; and a smattering of social-democrats and ex-Trotskyist and ex-Stalinist figures in the United Socialist Party (PSU).

Over decades the PS spent ruling France and waging austerity and war, these forces did everything they could to discredit the Marxist conception of socialism, upheld by the Trotskyist movement, as the outcome of revolutionary struggle for social equality led by the world working class. However, the deepest economic crisis of capitalism since the Great Depression of the 1930s, and the PS’ ever wilder shift to the right, as it now seeks to rehabilitate despicable policies like deprivation of nationality, has undermined the old political equilibrium upon which the PS rested.

If Aubry is concerned that Hollande has “undermined” her false conception of socialism, it is that the conditions are emerging for the masses of workers to turn to a struggle for socialism and against capitalism in opposition to the PS and its political allies in France and across Europe.



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