

France's Jean-Pierre Chevènement hails US President-elect Trump

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The election of Donald Trump as US president is exposing the toxic degeneration of broad layers of what passes for the “left” in France. Their decades-long evolution from social democracy into the orbit of the neo-fascist National Front (FN) has led them to hail the election of a far-right regime in the United States as a victory.

This takes a particularly repulsive form in the evolution of Jean-Pierre Chevènement, a co-founder of France's ruling Socialist Party (PS) in 1971. He later broke with the PS, founded the Republican and Citizen Movement (MRC) in 2003, then resigning from the MRC in June 2015.

While FN leader Marine Le Pen declared that Trump's election was a “political revolution,” Chevènement enthused: “The victory of Donald Trump is certainly a defeat for the establishment. Coming after Brexit, it is another blow struck against free-market globalization.”

The election of a demagogic billionaire, who is placing white-supremacist advisers in key White House posts, is a horrific collapse of American democracy. It is the product of mass anger and disillusionment with deep social inequality, the policies of war and austerity of the Democratic Party, and the bankruptcy of its racial and gender identity politics, which are totally indifferent to the concerns of the working class. A similar process is well underway in France, as the FN emerges as the main beneficiary of rising anger in the working class with the PS.

The only way to oppose the rise of far right in America and in Europe is to mobilize the working class in struggle, independently of and against the Democratic Party, the European social democrats, and their allies. Large sections of these forces are quite prepared to embrace alliances with far-right forces. Chevènement now publicly announces that he is trying to assemble a broad political coalition including the FN to pursue nationalist policies.

In a March television interview, Chevènement was asked about the large numbers of former MRC members now active in the FN. “I know many people claim to descend from me,” he replied. “I cannot control everything that is said. There are very diverse people, from the far right to the

far left passing through the center.” He added, “The people who claim to descend from me, we will see what they can do.”

He held up as an example the French ruling elite's rallying around General Charles de Gaulle in 1958, amid an army coup against France's social-democratic regime during the Algerian war. He said, “At some point, the National Front's rise will provoke a number of changes in the behavior of many of our political leaders. I think of something that could look like 1958, with the return of General de Gaulle. But there is no equivalent of General de Gaulle today, except me ...”

Chevènement's embrace of the far right is not an accident or a miscalculation. It is the outcome of his long career in bourgeois politics, which he launched by peddling a reactionary lie: that socialism can be established apart from the revolutionary mobilization of the working class, and in opposition to Trotskyism, by capitalist politicians.

Chevènement played a key role in the founding of the PS, in response to revolutionary workers' struggles of the 1960s and 1970s. In France, the May-June 1968 general strike, mobilizing over ten million workers, had brought de Gaulle's government to its knees. Although the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF) managed to end the strike and save the de Gaulle government, this betrayal discredited the PCF, the largest party in the working class. The French bourgeoisie was desperate to set up a new party to block a political movement to the left.

Having already founded the Center for Socialist Studies, Research, and Education (CERES) as a student at the elite National Administration School (ENA), Chevènement took the CERES into the PS to support its main founder, François Mitterrand. He backed Mitterrand, a former top official of the Nazi-collaborationist Vichy regime, inside the PS, which was from the beginning a party of finance capital. Chevènement helped draft the PS's Common Program with the PCF, the basis for the PCF's Union of the Left alliance with the PS in the 1970s.

The CERES advocated “self-management,” a conception

popular in middle-class “left” circles. It is a theory hostile to the seizure of power by the working class, claiming that social oppression could be overcome if workers and bosses all managed their own affairs. On this basis, Chevènement worked inside the PS with anti-Trotskyist forces like Lionel Jospin of the *Organisation Communiste Internationaliste*, which had broken with the International Committee of the Fourth International in 1971 to function inside the PS.

Based on fraudulent electoral promises first made in the Common Program, Mitterrand took power in 1981 and, just over a year later, moved against the workers, imposing spending cuts and mass layoffs in steel and auto.

While taking ministerial posts in Mitterrand’s 1981-1995 presidency, Chevènement also repeatedly resigned, making nationalist criticisms of PS policies. During Mitterrand’s initial “austerity turn,” Chevènement resigned to criticize Mitterrand’s claims that austerity was necessary to keep France in line with Germany inside the European Monetary System. Chevènement then served as Mitterrand’s defense minister, resigning in 1991 as Mitterrand supported the Gulf War against Iraq.

After the Stalinist bureaucracy dissolved the USSR and restored capitalism, and the PCF went into terminal collapse, Chevènement’s criticisms of the PS gradually acquired a different character. They originally served primarily to promote illusions that the PS was divided over its right-wing policies and might somehow pursue a different course. By peddling these lies, Chevènement aimed to keep workers and youth from breaking with the PS.

In the 2000s, his criticisms took on an ever more explicitly right-wing coloration. Chevènement joined Jospin’s 1997-2002 Plural Left government, serving as interior minister, but resigned in 2000 to criticize Jospin’s support for increased autonomy for Corsica. In the 2002 presidential elections, Chevènement ran not as a PS candidate, but with the so-called Republican Pole—an alliance including members of the New Royalist Action (NAR) group.

These forces played a major role in the ruling elite’s subsequent evolution far to the right, after 2002 and in particular after the 2008 global economic crisis. They tried to give a “democratic” face to far-right policies targeting immigrants and Muslims and directing rising social anger along nationalist, anti-European lines. This allowed the FN to rise, posturing as an “antiestablishment” party.

Renaming the Republican Pole the MRC in 2003, Chevènement worked with several politicians who now function in the FN’s top leadership. These included Florian Philippot, the FN’s number two and chief strategist, as well as individuals that now play leading roles in the FN’s work in the universities and trade unions: Valérie Laupies, Alain Avello, Yannick Jaffré and Gilles Lebreton.

Chevènement—with his impeccable connections to FN, army, and police circles—now works closely with far-right nationalists like France Arise of Nicolas Dupont-Aignan. At its conference last year, Chevènement insisted on the importance of “bringing all patriots together.”

He floated the idea of an “alliance of the sovereignists” including the FN, to the Public Senate channel: “Marine Le Pen, like everyone, should join me when I’m right... I call upon the socialists and republicans on the other side. I think the solution is to bring people together. The National Front electorate is very fluid and will know to come where the national interest is to be found.”

Marine Le Pen, for her part, had called for creating a “great patriotic alliance” in 2014: “There is Jean Pierre Chevènement’s party, the party of Nicolas Dupont-Aignan, the party of Philippe de Villiers, there are patriotic parties in France, it is possible that tomorrow all these parties could unite to defend the sovereignty of the nation and ensure its security and prosperity.”

These forces have played a sinister role, promoting anti-Muslim sentiment, working to normalize neo-fascism and encouraging law-and-order sentiment to limit opposition to the indefinitely extendable state of emergency imposed by the PS after last year’s Paris terror attacks. Conditions are being created for the FN to take power. Their appeals to Trump are unanswerable proof that this will be part of an attempt to impose dictatorship and war on the working class internationally to silence its growing anger at the bankrupt capitalist order.



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