

French right's presidential primary highlights shift far to the right

Alex Lantier, Alice Laurençon
25 November 2016

François Fillon and Alain Juppé, who are running Sunday in the second round of the French right's primary for the 2017 presidential elections, held one last debate on Thursday night.

After the surprise victory of Donald Trump in the US presidential elections, the sudden victory of Fillon in the first round underscored that bourgeois politics is currently undergoing a major historic turn, far to the right. Alain Juppé, the former front-runner who tried to hide his program of drastic austerity, war, and police-state measures by pledging to “bring people together,” suffered a humiliating defeat. Currently, Fillon is set to receive 65 percent of the vote in the second round, according to an Odoxa poll.

Given the ruling Socialist Party's (PS) profound unpopularity, Fillon would become the most likely candidate to run against the neo-fascist National Front's (FN) Marine Pen in the presidential run off next year. Fillon bases himself on Juppé's program, but pushes certain policies much further. Above all, he is justifying them with numerous positions echoing those of the far right—hostile to abortion, towards homosexual marriage, or stirring up anti-Muslim or anti-Semitic prejudices.

The campaign points to an intensification of the broad attacks on the working class and an escalation of French participation in various wars led by NATO, as well as the eruption of very sharp class conflicts, after next year's presidential elections. The programs of Fillon and Juppé already face broad popular opposition among 56 and 52 percent of the French people, respectively.

Tuesday, Juppé provoked criticisms from other members of his The Republicans (LR) party when he called Fillon's program “retrograde” and “based on great social brutality.” The two candidates' decision to

mute their differences and hold a cordial debate, in order to make a public show of LR party unity, had the effect of underlining the close resemblances between the policies proposed by the two candidates.

Neither one mentioned the state of emergency that has now been in effect for over a year in France, or the danger of war with Russia or other major powers opposing the imperialist wars led by NATO in Syria and across the Middle East. Support for these policies is in fact unanimous among all the candidates of government parties.

The debate concentrated on budget cuts and attacks on social services being prepared against the population, Fillon's reactionary positions on lifestyle issues, as well as on France's foreign policy alignment.

Fillon and Juppé both propose public sector job cuts (500,000 and 200,000, respectively), pushing the retirement age back to 65, cutting taxes on profits from capital, cutting the ISF tax on the wealthy, and deep budget cuts (€100 billion and over €85 billion, respectively).

Fillon denounced a question from journalists on his attitude to fundamental social rights granted after the end of World War II in France. He replied, “This French social model does not exist anymore today. We are not in 1945 anymore, we are in an open world, we must profoundly change this model so it is more fair.”

Fillon also defended his proposals to transfer responsibility for reimbursements of numerous health care treatments from Social Security to private insurance—thus paving the way for the privatization of health care, supposedly to carry out the “debureaucratization” and “revival” of France.

Fillon and Juppé then arrogantly defended the bailout plans for the banks organized by the French right, when it was in power at the time of the 2008 financial crash.

While defending this granting of enormous sums to the financial aristocracy, they shamelessly proposed massive job cuts, unprecedented austerity measures, and the destruction of social gains won by the working class over decades of struggle in the 20th century.

Juppé and Fillon also sparred over Fillon's reactionary comments on abortion, which Fillon has stated he does not believe is a "fundamental right," as well as his declaration that France "does not have multiculturalism as its calling."

The two candidates reaffirmed their preference for a supposedly independent policy vis-a-vis both the United States and Russia, as well as their support for NATO and the Atlantic alliance. In a gesture that can have no other significance than a declaration of hostility to Germany, the European Union's dominant power, Fillon predicted that thanks to his austerity policies, France could soon become Europe's principal power.

In fact, the reactionary positions of Fillon and Juppé show that the ruling class is preparing for a sharp confrontation with the working class, under conditions of explosive war crises abroad and police-state rule at home in France.

The rightward lurch in official politics evidenced in the election of a demagogic and fascistic billionaire as US president is also coming to France.

A deep economic and geo-strategic crisis of world capitalism is staggering the political elites and resuscitating the most retrograde political tendencies. In France, the primary responsibility lies with the PS of President François Hollande, and the pseudo left parties like the New Anticapitalist Party that called for an Hollande vote in 2012. The PS' state of emergency, the war drive in Syria, and Hollande's austerity policy have all produced a deep destabilization of class relations and of the political establishment in France.

The PS' sharp turn to the right and its appeals to the far right, such as its attempt to inscribe the state of emergency and the deprivation of nationality policy in the constitution, has left the French right trapped. As it desperately tries to stay to the right of the PS—while it is in fact in agreement with it on the issues of war, austerity, and attacks on democratic rights—it is taking far-right positions on lifestyle issues that the PS and the pseudo left parties have placed at the center of their activity.

On Europe1 on Wednesday, Fillon attacked the Muslim and Jewish communities: "Muslim extremists are taking the Muslim community hostage," he said. "We must fight this fundamentalism, we must fight it as we did in the past, I recall, we fought forms of Catholic fundamentalism and also the willingness of the Jews to live in a community which did not respect all the rules of the French Republic."

France's Grand Rabbi Haïm Korsia telephoned Fillon to recall that the consigning of Jews to ghettos in France was due to French anti-Semitism, not to a freely-taken decision. He "underlined that the Jewish tendency to live apart that could exist in an earlier period was neither due to nor chosen by the citizens of Jewish faith, but the consequence of French society's refusal at the time to accept its fellows," Korsia's staff reported.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact