

# Socialist Party officials back banker Macron in French presidential elections

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As the January 22 and 29 Socialist Party (PS) presidential primary approached, 46 PS elected officials in the Lyon region signed a manifesto on January 17 announcing a boycott of the two rounds of the Socialist Party presidential primary. They are instead supporting the PS government's former economy minister, Emmanuel Macron, who is running an independent campaign.

Socialist Party officials in other districts, including Maine-et-Loire and the Pas-de-Calais, also signalled that they would support Macron if there were not significant voter participation in the PS primary.

The decision of various PS members to oppose a candidate of their own party testifies to the advanced state of crisis of the party, which fears a debacle in the April-May 2017 French presidential election. The Socialist Party has been profoundly discredited by President François Hollande's record of austerity, police-state measures and war. His approval rating has sunk to 4 percent in the polls, and Hollande is France's most unpopular president of all time.

All throughout their campaigns, however, the PS candidates hailed the Hollande administration, and all of them signalled that they would continue the broad outlines of the current administration's agenda.

After a decade of deep austerity since the 2008 financial crisis and the escalating imperialist war drive in Mali, Libya and Syria, the Socialist Party is hated by a large majority of the French population. Whichever candidate wins the primary, polls indicate he is likely to obtain fewer votes than Macron, right-wing candidate François Fillon or Marine Le Pen, the leader of the far-right National Front (FN).

The candidacies of Benoît Hamon and Arnaud Montebourg—who are rising in the polls, with Hamon ultimately beating Valls in the first round—represent the

Socialist Party's so-called “rebel” wing. In government and in their presidential campaigns, they weakly criticized the Hollande government, in order to win support and give a thin political cover to the PS's anti-worker, anti-democratic and pro-war policies.

Hamon, who calls for the creation of a universal basic income and increases to public spending, represents those sections of the PS who want to keep close links with pseudo-left organizations like the New Anti-capitalist Party and the Left Front and create illusions that the PS can represent a “left” alternative in France. Hamon has called for discussions—should he become the PS presidential candidate—with Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the former leader of the Left Party (PG).

A considerable fraction of the Socialist Party, which does not want to align itself with Hamon if he becomes the PS candidate after the primary, is preparing to back Macron.

According to Hollande's associates, the president himself is considering ditching the PS and supporting Macron. “François Hollande will probably support Macron,” one of his friends, the lawyer Dominique Villemot, told the *Journal du Dimanche*, before distancing himself from the comment a few hours later.

In this crisis, PS officials and members are trying to best position themselves for the post-election situation. Broad sections of the Socialist Party backing Hollande are using the predicted debacle to line up behind Macron. The latter, as Hollande's former economy minister, enjoys the support of considerable portions of the ruling elite and the media, who are promoting his campaign as an alternative to Fillon and Le Pen.

Last April, as demonstrations against the PS's regressive labour law exploded across France, Macron launched his electoral movement, “Onward March!” He stressed his style as a young entrepreneur to give a

false veneer of modernity and progressiveness to social attacks on the working class.

Macron backs the European Union (EU), opposes the 35-hour workweek and calls for more law and order, including the creation of 10,000 state employees working in the police or the paramilitary *gendarmerie*. Faced with the crisis resulting from Brexit, Donald Trump's hostility to the EU and popular opposition to the EU across the continent, business circles are seeking a safe pair of hands to pursue the pro-austerity, pro-EU program of Hollande and prevent a collapse of the EU.

Fillon and Le Pen are criticizing the EU from the right and seeking to establish closer links with Moscow. Macron seems thus to be the only candidate who conceivably could win the election and who also proposes a strategy of protecting the French bourgeoisie's interests from within the EU.

Macron is hardly the first PS-linked official to decide to create a semi-independent group. In 2009, Mélenchon left the Socialist Party to create the Left Party (PG), which he tied up to the political and trade union apparatus of the Communist Party to create an effective electoral alliance.

These tendencies emerging from the PS are not launching their movements because they are hostile to Hollande's anti-worker policies. If Macron is more explicitly hostile to workers and more openly favourable to the interests of the financial aristocracy, Mélenchon, for his part, proclaimed the death of the left and socialism and the political irrelevance of the working class in 2014.

The Socialist Party's turn towards Macron is not simply the product of the most recent crisis shaking the PS. The conception of a party of the bourgeois "left" working to defend capitalism in the post-World War II period is collapsing. The Socialist Party crisis and the turn of large sections of it toward Macron underscore the reactionary and pro-capitalist character of the PS, which can offer nothing to the working class.



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