

Corruption allegations undermine French presidential candidate François Fillon

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4 February 2017

Just over a week after allegations of corruption were first published, French presidential candidate François Fillon has come under increasing pressure as more information emerges.

Last Wednesday, the satirical newspaper *Le Canard Enchaîné* published allegations that Fillon, the candidate for the conservative The Republicans (LR) party, had paid his wife Penelope €600,000 over eight years for a fictitious job as his parliamentary assistant. This allegedly also included €500,000 as a “parliamentary attaché” for Marc Joulard, a deputy who replaced Fillon in the Assembly during the time that Fillon was a minister in government.

The newspaper cited statements from another attaché, Jeanne Robinson-Behre, who had worked for Joulard during the same period, in which she claimed not to recall any occasion when Penelope Fillon ever did any work for Joulard. Fillon has not denied that his wife received this sum of money, but has repeatedly declared that she had done work to justify her salary, such as meeting guests in his absence and proof-reading drafts of his speeches.

The allegations against Fillon were fuelled by a video aired on television channel France2 on Thursday. The video showed an extract from an interview with UK newspaper the *Sunday Telegraph* in 2007, in which Penelope Fillon stated, “I have never been actually his assistant or anything like that.”

“I don’t deal with his public relations”, she added.

In its most recent edition, *Le Canard Enchaîné* has stated that the amount paid to Fillon’s wife was higher than initially thought, at approximately €831,000.

It also alleged that Fillon paid €84,000 of public funds to two of his children, who he supposedly hired as legal advisers while he was senator, in 2005 and 2007. This is despite the fact that neither of his children had finished their legal studies and were therefore not qualified as lawyers, leading to further speculation over what work

they supposedly did.

Although it is still unclear whether the payouts to Penelope Fillon and to Fillon’s two children were technically illegal, due to the flexibility of French laws on hiring family members and parliamentary assistants, the allegations are discrediting not only Fillon, but the entire political establishment. While demanding that the working class endure draconian austerity measures, the ruling elite is able to procure hundreds of thousands of euros of public funds for their own benefit.

Media and political circles are increasingly wary of the consequences of scandals like these in further distancing the working class from the established parties.

An editorial published yesterday in *Le Monde* stated: “By taking the French people as fools, by allowing them to see and hear such levels of indifference towards them, by getting rid of even the slightest show of integrity, we will end up, one way or another, by deepening their disgust with government business and by provoking their revolt—and legitimately.” With their sense of impunity and blind egotism, it continued, “the candidates responsible for this state of affairs will only have themselves to reproach. But it’ll be too late.”

The publication of this new information has provoked intense divisions within LR, whose candidate has gone from being the favourite for the presidency, to facing an electoral debacle. According to a recent survey, 76 percent of the French population said they were not convinced by Fillon’s statements about the allegations. Polls now predict that Fillon would only gain 19 to 20 percent of the vote in the first round of the presidential elections, coming in behind PS-linked banker Emmanuel Macron and National Front (FN) candidate Marine Le Pen. This would eliminate him from the second round.

As the European powers scramble to respond to Donald Trump—whose administration is backing Le Pen, who has taken Trump’s election as a sign that she can win the

French presidency—LR are debating how to salvage their candidacy and assert French capitalism’s interests on the world stage.

On Thursday, 17 prominent LR officials, including LR General Secretary Bernard Accoyer, and former candidates for the LR primary Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet and Bruno Le Maire, penned an editorial in the French newspaper *Le Figaro*, in which they declared their “total support” for Fillon, and denounced the allegations as “rumours, approximations and slander”.

However, other officials have called for Fillon to step down, and cede his nomination to another LR candidate. Calling the results of the November primary contest, which nominated Fillon as LR candidate, “null and void when confronted with these unpredictable developments”, the deputy for the Rhone region, George Fenech, called for the LR to organise a national council meeting in order to “find a solution.”

Sections of the LR are manoeuvring to install as presidential nominee Alain Juppé, who came in second after Fillon in the primaries. LR deputy Philippe Gosselin confirmed on Thursday that an open letter calling for the nomination of Juppé was being prepared, and was “ready to be signed by several dozens of deputies.”

With the Socialist Party (PS) also deeply divided over last Sunday’s nomination of Benoît Hamon as presidential candidate, the French ruling elite is faced with the possibility of the collapse of the two major parties of bourgeois rule for the last half century.

Broad sections of the French and European ruling elite are concerned that Le Pen could benefit from the breakdown of these two parties, and widespread popular disgust with the entire political establishment in France. Le Pen is resolutely hostile to the European Union (EU), and in the wake of the Brexit vote in the UK and Donald Trump’s hostile stance towards the EU, an FN presidency would profoundly change the EU, threatening its very survival.



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