

Fillon to continue his French presidential bid despite indictment

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François Fillon, the presidential candidate of the right-wing Les Républicains (LR), held an emergency press conference Wednesday afternoon to announce that he would continue his campaign despite being indicted on charges of organizing no-show jobs for his wife, Penelope.

In August, he had criticized his then-rival for the LR nomination, ex-President Nicolas Sarkozy, for facing multiple trials. He declared, “If I were indicted, I would not be a candidate in the presidential election, it’s a moral issue.”

Now, the LR candidate is announcing that he will continue his campaign despite his imminent indictment over a series of alleged no-show jobs that netted his wife at least €900,000 as a parliamentary aide and employee of the *Revue des deux mondes*. However, the scandal threatens not only his candidacy, but the unity of LR and potentially even the normal holding of the elections.

“My lawyer has learned that I will be summoned on March 15 to be indicted,” Fillon said at his campaign headquarters Wednesday. “Yes, I will be a presidential candidate, and we will draw from these challenges ... the extra energy we need to win and reinforce our country.”

The Fillon indictment underscores the extraordinary virulence of the factional battles inside the ruling class, both in France and internationally, in the run-up to the April-May 2017 elections.

In his press conference, Fillon questioned the impartiality of the justice system and the role of the Socialist Party (PS) government, which doubtless exerted considerable pressure behind the scenes to secure an indictment. He declared, “Only universal suffrage, and not a trial waged for purposes of persecution, can decide who will be the next president

of the Republic. ... I will go to the end, because besides myself, it is democracy that is being defied.”

This provoked a response from President François Hollande, who denounced “any questioning of the judiciary”. He added, “Being a presidential candidate does not give one a blank check to cast suspicion on the work of police and judges, to create a climate of mistrust incompatible with one of responsibility, or worse, to make extremely serious accusations against the judiciary and, more broadly, our institutions.”

The evidence against Fillon in the case is overwhelming. In 2007, as Fillon became prime minister under Sarkozy, Penelope Fillon told Britain’s *Daily Telegraph* that “I was never his parliamentary assistant” and added, “I did not take care of his public relations, either.” Given the absence of any concrete proof that Penelope Fillon did any work whatsoever, over a month after the initial accusations surfaced in the press, Fillon is in extreme legal jeopardy.

It is not, however, the French political establishment’s undeniable corruption, or even less the popular anger and alienation from its austerity policies, aggressively advocated by Fillon, that made the judiciary break the traditional “Republican truce” of the election period and indict Fillon. It is the deep conflict inside the imperialist bourgeoisies of the NATO alliance that have come to the surface, particularly since the election of Donald Trump as US president, that is driving the crisis of the Fillon campaign.

The sums of money handed over to Penelope Fillon pale in comparison to those plundered over decades by French imperialism’s networks in Africa, which went to pay off both the PS and the French right, as emerged in the Elf affair in the 1990s and 2000s. These parties divided up among themselves vast sums siphoned out

of the billions of euros in profits realized by French oil firms in France's old colonial empire in Africa—a process that took place behind the back of the French electorate.

Now, however, with NATO deeply divided over international strategy, particularly in the context of its war drive against Russia, the judiciary is threatening to use “Penelopegate” to blow up the LR campaign, with the backing of the PS and its international allies.

According to the January 25 article of the satirical weekly *Canard Enchaîné* that set off the scandal, journalists discovered Penelope Fillon's work arrangements in November. Just after the election of Trump's far right administration in Washington, linked to France's neo-fascist National Front (FN) and suspected of pro-Russian sympathies, they were looking for potential Russian links of Fillon's lucrative 2F consulting company. The Democratic Party and factions of US intelligence, working with Berlin and Paris, were attacking Trump for his alleged unwillingness to confront Russia.

The *Canard* published its article only a few days after Fillon traveled to Berlin, where he proposed an alliance between Berlin, Paris and Moscow to counterbalance the new US administration. It was after this proposal of a geopolitical alignment that is fundamentally unacceptable to Washington, as well as to powerful sections of the European ruling class, that the judicial and media campaign against Fillon was launched.

Now, after his press conference Wednesday, ever broader sections of Fillon's backers in the French right are withdrawing their support. The Union of Democrats and Independents (UDI), a small party allied to LR, said it would suspend its participation in Fillon's campaign.

Even as the ruling class increasingly worries about FN candidate Marine Le Pen's rise in the polls, and even a hypothetical victory in the run-off handing Le Pen the presidency, many LR supporters of Fillon are demanding that he fulfill the promise he made last August and withdraw.

LR has not formulated any clear strategy if Fillon withdraws, but its representative for European and foreign affairs, Bruno Le Maire, demanded his withdrawal. Le Maire said this was “indispensable” for the credibility “of politics.”

LR deputies Sébastien Huyghe, Laure de la Raudière, and Pierre Lellouche also appealed to Fillon to withdraw. Lellouche said he was considering launching a case before the Constitutional Council to demand a postponement of the presidential election, so that LR would have the time to nominate a new candidate.

A LR councillor in Paris, Jérôme Dubus, said he would leave Fillon's campaign to support independent (but PS-backed) candidate Emmanuel Macron, a banker and former economy minister under Hollande.



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