

Why are French media obsessed with Ecology Minister Hulot's resignation?

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For a week, the French political establishment has been giving wall-to-wall coverage to the sudden resignation of Ecology Minister Nicolas Hulot on August 28. He announced his resignation in a short statement in an interview on France Inter radio, apparently without warning either President Emmanuel Macron or Prime Minister Edouard Philippe. Just before, he had declared that the government had not reached any of its ecological objectives, because it was not interested in them. He added that his decision had “matured over many months.”

Pundits and politicians turned Hulot, the former presenter on the extreme sports TV show “Ushuaïa,” into a great moral conscience of France, and his resignation into a moral crisis of the government.

Le Point called it “A resignation that hurts,” while *Le Monde* said the autumn would be “struck by the Hulot storm.” Unsubmissive France (LFI) leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon hailed Hulot's gesture as “a vote to censure Macron.” Olivier Besancenot, of the Pabloite New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA), applauded Hulot's resignation on Twitter, writing: “For Macron it's not just the political back-to-school period, it's a car crash!”

One-term ex-president François Hollande saluted Hulot, intoning, “He was right!” Hollande added, “I know what he brings, he is both a conscience and an expert of planetary issues.”

Macron's party, The Republic on the March (LRM), did not admit to being moved, but was at least “bothered” by Hulot's resignation. *Le Monde* wrote, “This departure upsets the vast majority of the members of the president's party, who were deeply attached to the person of this ecologist and the causes he defends.” It cited an LRM leader who said Hulot represented “a struggle for ecology that is based in

reality,” that is to say, based on capitalism, that corresponds “perfectly to the political identity of LRM members. His departure leaves us pretty bothered.”

With this flood of platitudes about Hulot, the ruling elite is trying to reassure TV audiences, and itself, on the cheap. Despite the collapse of the big-business Socialist Party (PS) last year and rising working-class anger at austerity, the political establishment is recklessly plunging ahead with plans to demolish the pension system and pledging to spend hundreds of billions of euros on the army. Fifty years after the May 1968 general strike, an explosive confrontation is being prepared.

Indeed, 10 days after an Elabe poll found that only 16 percent of Frenchmen think Macron's policy helps France, and only 6 percent think it helps them, the media are all talking about Macron's crisis. But it is only to noisily and endlessly congratulate itself that the ruling establishment contains moral giants, like what they pretend Hulot is, who are capable of being so true to themselves.

The constant praise of Hulot obscures the vast unpopularity of attacks on workers' social rights; the role played by LFI, the NPA and the trade unions who sign contracts validating Macron's social attacks; and the real danger of war. As Hulot resigned, Moscow was urgently warning NATO of the danger of a direct military clash in Syria. The official obsession with Hulot only underscores the vast class gulf separating the financial aristocracy from the workers and the perplexity of a ruling class that is historically doomed.

Of course, as the media never tire of repeating, Hulot is France's most popular politician—though it is from the not-so-towering heights of a 38 percent approval rating. This puts him above Macron, Philippe and Mélenchon (17 percent in July). It is true that unlike

Hollande or Macron, the presenter of “Ushuaïa” gives the impression that he would be happier doing TV entertainment than ordering drone murder or shaking the hand of a bloodthirsty dictator like Hollande’s friend, Egyptian General Abdel Fattah al Sisi.

Hulot was clever enough not to comment on the main policies of the government of which he was a member: the vast surge in military spending, the building of a network of internment camps for refugees, and the slashing of workers’ social rights. Unlike Macron, he did not snigger at the death of Comorian refugees drowning in the Indian Ocean or denounce the “crazy amounts of money” that France spends on social programmes for the working poor.

The fact that one becomes by default France’s most popular minister by not commenting on political events testifies, however, not to the strength but the degeneracy of the ruling elite. If this silence won him a small measure of popular sympathy, it does not make him a moral titan.

Hulot did not oppose the policies of the most right-wing government France has known since the Nazi occupation, a government he said he had “immense friendship” with as he resigned. He did not resign after Macron demolished the Labour Code with his antidemocratic decrees, launched an unprovoked bombing of Syria, privatised the National Railways, or rammed through a draconian immigration bill destroying the right to asylum.

He had entered the government knowing full well it was dedicated to austerity and militarism and based its foreign policy on France’s nuclear deterrent. When Macron sent military police to besiege and then brutally assault ecological protesters at Notre-Dame-des-Landes, Hulot approved the assault and hailed the policemen for their “restraint.”

His presence in government underscores above all the hypocrisy and blindness of a certain type of petty-bourgeois Green politics, which criticises the construction of nuclear power plants but calmly watches on as the government plans nuclear war.

Hulot declared a net worth of €7.2 million, including a personal fleet of six cars that attracted criticism for giving Hulot a large carbon footprint. In the context of the #MeToo campaign, Hulot was also targeted this spring by still unverified rape allegations from sections of the PS that were vastly hyped by the media and

linked to aggressive calls for his resignation.

Now, he is instead being hailed for choosing the right time to leave the government, whose actions are now directly contradicting Hulot’s statements. The day after he resigned, a joint report of the economy ministry and Hulot’s own ecology ministry, stamped “top secret,” called for the building of six new nuclear reactors in France.

With Hulot running the ecology ministry, the government stepped up the burial of nuclear waste, even as studies confirm the rise of cancer rates around burial sites like Soulaines. Health researchers have confirmed a 28 percent increase in lung cancer mortality in a 15-kilometre radius around the nuclear site at Soulaines compared to the entire Aube and Haute Marne administrative department where Soulaines is located.

To win over the hunting lobby, the Macron government is working on a reform of hunting laws that makes broad concessions to traditionally right-wing hunters’ organisations. Hulot was then beset by criticisms from animal rights and scientific groups.

With relations between the financial aristocracy and the working class tense to the point of breakdown, Hulot carried out a policy that was entirely based on entertaining certain ecological and political illusions in wealthy and conformist layers of society. In the working class, an entirely different type of movement is being prepared, with revolutionary implications.



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