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The collapse of the French government: A crisis of capitalist rule in Europe

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The new Socialist Party (PS) government named Tuesday, a day after the last government suddenly collapsed amid criticisms of French President François Hollande's unpopular austerity policies, testifies to the disintegration of official "left" politics in France and the crisis of capitalist rule in Europe. As the European economy plunges and support for the PS collapses, Hollande has nothing to offer but a further shift to the right.

Hollande and Prime Minister Manuel Valls summarily fired a group of PS ministers, led by Economy Minister Arnaud Montebourg, who publicly attacked Hollande's austerity agenda as politically suicidal and dictated by a hostile Germany. Tensions had exploded within the cabinet, with Culture Minister Aurélie Filippetti reportedly shouting at one point that the PS did not have a left-wing policy.

The new PS cabinet named by Hollande and Valls, whose rock-bottom poll ratings continue to plunge, will intensify the class war the PS is waging against workers. Its first move was to begin planning a regressive and politically explosive 15 billion euro hike in sales taxes.

Its arrogant contempt for the people is symbolized by its choice of Emmanuel Macron, 36, a millionaire investment banker and graduate of the elite National Administration School (ENA), as economy minister. A free-marketer previously passed up for ministerial posts because he has

never been elected to any position, he advised Hollande early in his term to be “ready to lose mid-term elections.”

Montebourg’s faction is no less bankrupt and reactionary. A proponent of French industrial competitiveness, working with members of the US Federal Reserve who advocate freer credit and bigger bank bailouts than the German-influenced European Central Bank, which controls the euro, Montebourg supports cuts in wages and social spending. Last month, backing the budget cuts in Hollande’s Responsibility Pact, he said: “We must not challenge the 50 billion in cuts, we must rather use them the right way, to give them back to the French people.”

The crisis of Hollande’s government is tearing the mask off of the PS, a right-wing party of finance capital that has suffered a comprehensive shipwreck. It is also an indictment of France’s corrupt pseudo-left parties, such as the New Anti-capitalist Party and the Stalinist-led Left Front. These parties of the affluent middle class, which has for decades strangled working class opposition to the PS, endorsed Hollande’s election in 2012 and bear full political responsibility for his policies.

Montebourg’s extraordinary attack on Germany also testifies to the ongoing breakdown of the European Union (EU). Four years ago, French President Nicolas Sarkozy banged his fists and shouted at German Chancellor Angela Merkel that France would leave the euro currency if the EU bailout of Greece did not respect French interests. French and German banks ultimately arranged to jointly loot the Greek workers, and for a time inter-imperialist tensions within Europe faded from view.

However, as Hollande and the PS continue down the austerity course of Prime Minister Giorgios Papandreou of Greece’s ill-fated social democratic PASOK party, these tensions are resurfacing, amid rising support across Europe for anti-EU parties such as France’s neo-fascist National Front (FN).

The entire framework of official “left” politics, which has completely disenfranchised the working class, is now collapsing in France and across Europe. What is being prepared is the explosive entry of the French and the international working class into revolutionary struggle against capitalism and its “left” defenders.

The semi-socialistic promises that defenders of European capitalism made after World War II and the collapse of fascist rule in Europe read like mockeries today. In its 1944 program, the bourgeois, social democratic and Stalinist forces of the National Resistance Council pledged for post-war French capitalism “the creation of a true economic and social democracy, entailing the eviction of the great economic and financial feudalities from leadership of the economy.”

What is the reality? As the institutions of bourgeois Europe collapse, a financial aristocracy exercises dictatorial sway over living conditions of hundreds of millions of workers. It is utterly impervious to alternations between overtly right-wing and bourgeois “left” parties at the ballot box. Unlike 70 years ago, however, it rules France not through the fascist dictatorship of the Nazi-collaborationist Vichy regime, but through the various agencies and political accomplices of a party that cynically claims to be socialist.

Central responsibility for this lies with various descendants of renegades from Trotskyism. Terrified by the last great revolutionary uprising of the French working class, the 1968 general strike, they ceaselessly promoted as “left” the newly-founded PS and its leader, the ex-Vichy official and bourgeois adventurer François Mitterrand. The Internationalist Communist Organization, formerly the French section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), broke with the ICFI and with Trotskyism to pursue a “Union of the Left” with the PS and the Stalinist French Communist Party.

In the event, these forces built the framework for bourgeois “left” rule in France in the next five decades, centered around the PS. Adapting to the austerity measures and imperialist wars of the 1981-1995 Mitterrand presidency and the Stalinist restoration of capitalism in the USSR, they became a distinct social layer consciously hostile to the workers, to Marxism, and to socialist revolution.

Under the influence of these parties and associated postmodernist intellectuals, the entire content of “left” politics was redefined. Class struggle was replaced by “social dialog” between the bosses and France’s corrupt union bureaucracy; opposition to imperialism was replaced by support for its “humanitarian” wars; and the working class was repudiated as a revolutionary social force.

Summarizing the politics of this layer shortly before his election two years ago, Hollande complacently told the *New York Times*: “Today there are no more communists in France. The left liberalized the economy and opened markets to finance and privatization. There is nothing to fear.”

The ICFI and its supporters in France beg to differ: there is a powerful opposition to capitalism and growing socialist sentiment in the working class. We are setting out to build a French section of the ICFI as the Trotskyist alternative to the failed apparatus of the PS and its allies. Our aim is to offer political leadership to the working class in the coming revolutionary struggles—in which the workers in France will find natural allies in the workers of Greece, Germany, the United States and beyond. We insist that what has failed is not socialism, but the reactionary politics of its pseudo-left opponents.