

Allegations of manipulation in French Socialist Party's presidential primary

By Alex Lantier
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As Socialist Party (PS) presidential candidates Benoît Hamon and Manuel Valls began campaigning in the runoff to secure the PS nomination after the first round of the primary Sunday, the contest was marred with allegations of manipulation. This marks a further blow to the PS, which faces an electoral wipeout and possible disintegration after the April-May 2017 presidential election, due to the deep unpopularity of PS President François Hollande's record of austerity and war.

On Monday morning, voter participation in the primary according to the PS authorities had jumped by 350,000 compared to the previous night, to 1.6 million. PS officials had said that they hoped to announce that 2 million voters had participated in the primary, to compare favorably to the over 4 million voters who participated in the right-wing The Republicans (LR) primary. Inexplicably, the percentages of the different PS candidates had not changed despite the extra votes, though 161 extra votes were mysteriously attributed to one candidate, Sylvia Pinel.

Primary organizer Christophe Borgel gave an absurd and unconvincing explanation, simultaneously blaming the error on computer error and then admitting that his team posted inaccurate, unverified results on the primary web site. The aim was apparently to highlight increased voter participation, before it was known for whom the different voters had in fact voted.

Borgel declared, "There was a bug, nothing more. And it's sort of my fault. There was a lot of pressure about participation levels; I asked for the results [on voter participation] to be updated as fast as possible. And indeed, we applied to the new total number of voters the percentages [the candidates had received] the day before."

Late this evening, Borgel blamed the false data on

"an error of the PS staff member who posted the numbers online," saying it was "more human error than a computer bug."

Asked about the unexplained attribution of 161 votes to Pinel, Borgel said, "That was a bug, too. There were bugs on bugs. I don't know if it's the service-providing company (who oversees the provision of vote totals from voting precincts) or the internal IT system that is responsible, and I will not blame people who are working like mad on the enormous machine that is this primary."

A member of Hamon's team told *L'Internaute* that he suspected that Valls, "with his back to the wall," had decided to fix the numbers so that Valls "did not lose face."

Around 7pm yesterday, the PS primary authorities published official primary results they claimed had been verified. These gave 35.86 percent to Hamon, 31.22 percent to Valls, the former prime minister, and 17.30 percent to former Industry Minister Arnaud Montebourg.

The charges of manipulation only highlighted the PS's desperation, and the ever-sharper factional conflict in its ranks as it faces a disaster in the presidential election. Neither Hamon nor Valls is predicted to win more than 10 percent of the vote, leaving them behind former Hollande advisor and Rothschild banker Emmanuel Macron, and former Left Party leader and PS minister Jean-Luc Mélenchon. All these candidates would be eliminated, according to current polls, setting up a runoff between right-wing candidate François Fillon and neo-fascist Marine Le Pen.

For Valls and Hollande, the result is a further humiliating setback. After Hollande decided due to his deep unpopularity not to run—the first time a French

president did not seek reelection since the creation of the office in 1958—Valls, supposedly Hollande’s most popular minister until he resigned to run for the presidency, has gone down to defeat. With Montebourg calling on his voters to vote for Hamon, and Peillon still undecided on whom to support, polls show that Hamon is poised to defeat Valls in this Sunday’s runoff. He would win 52 percent of the vote.

Yesterday, Valls canceled an electoral meeting at Cenon in the Gironde region around Bordeaux. On TF1 television last night, he attacked Hamon’s signature proposal for a universal minimum revenue to be paid to all French people by the state as “ruin for our national budget” and denounced Hamon as “an advocate of the end of labor.”

Valls’ campaign is being rapidly undermined, however, by ever more pressing calls by sections of the PS, notably those around Lyon mayor Gérard Collomb, for PS officials to abandon the primary process before it produces an Hamon victory and instead support Macron for president.

The PS, a bedrock of bourgeois rule in France since its foundation nearly a half century ago after the May-June 1968 general strike, faces collapse. As the European Union and social-democratic parties across Europe are discredited by their decades-long pursuit of policies of austerity and war, the PS could well go the way of Greece’s Pasok party, which has disintegrated and collapsed into a minor parliamentary party.

The surprise victory of Hamon, who rose in the polls over the last couple of weeks, has led sections of the PS to try to revive their fortunes, using Hamon’s call for a universal minimum salary to try to give their policies a “left” face. To the extent that this won a certain hearing among PS voters, 55 percent of whom supported the measure, they voted for Hamon to register their anger and opposition to Hollande.

It is impossible, however, to oppose Hollande’s program through support of any faction of the PS, which was from its foundation in 1969 a reactionary bourgeois party. Hamon himself campaigned on the basis of anti-Russian appeals and calls for stepped-up police powers, and his policies have little support. His proposal for a universal minimum salary is largely unpopular, with 61 percent of the population opposed, though 63 percent support the abrogation of Hollande’s labor law.

Hamon received endorsements from several high-ranking PS figures, including Lille mayor Martine Aubry and Hollande’s former justice minister, Christiane Taubira.

Like Hamon and Montebourg, who were Hollande administration ministers affiliated with the PS’s “rebel” faction in the National Assembly, Aubry and Taubira were publicly critical of several key initiatives of the Hollande administration. Aubry criticized Hollande’s regressive labor law, which allows the government and the trade unions to scrap protections in France Labor Code, and Taubira opposed Hollande’s call to inscribe in the constitution the state’s ability to deprive individuals of their French nationality.

Nonetheless, like the PS “rebels” who did not seek to bring down Hollande’s government in the National Assembly over its reactionary plans, both Aubry and Taubira continued to support Hollande despite their criticisms.

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