

France: Another Ghastly Presidential Election Campaign; The Deep State Rises to the Surface

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As if the 2016 U.S. presidential election campaign hadn't been horrendous enough, here comes another one: in France.

The system in France is very different, with multiple candidates in two rounds, most of them highly articulate, who often even discuss real issues. Free television time reduces the influence of big money. The first round on April 23 will select the two finalists for the May 7 runoff, allowing for much greater choice than in the United States.

But monkey see, monkey do, and the mainstream political class wants to mimic the ways of the Empire, even echoing the theme that dominated the 2016 show across the Atlantic: the evil Russians are messing with our wonderful democracy.

The aping of the U.S. system began with “primaries” held by the two main governing parties which obviously aspire to establish themselves as the equivalent of American Democrats and Republicans in a two-party system. The right-wing party of former president Nicolas Sarkozy has already renamed itself *Les Républicains* and the so-called Socialist Party leaders are just waiting for the proper occasion to call themselves *Les Démocrates*. But as things are going, neither one of them may come out ahead this time.

Given the nearly universal disaffection with the outgoing Socialist Party government of President François Hollande, the Republicans were long seen as the natural favorites to defeat Marine LePen, who is shown by all polls to top the first round. With such promising prospects, the Republican primary brought out more than twice as many volunteer voters (they must pay a small sum and claim allegiance to the party's “values” in order to vote) as the Socialists. Sarkozy was eliminated, but more surprising, so was the favorite, the reliable establishment team player, Bordeaux mayor Alain Juppé, who had been leading in the polls and in media editorials.

Fillon's Family Values

In a surprise show of widespread public disenchantment with the political scene, Republican voters gave landside victory to former prime minister François Fillon, a practicing Catholic with an ultra-neoliberal domestic policy: lower taxes for corporations, drastic cuts in social welfare, even health insurance benefits – accelerating what previous governments have been doing but more openly. Less conventionally, Fillon strongly condemns the current anti Russian policy. Fillon also deviates from the Socialist government's single-minded commitment to overthrowing Assad by showing sympathy for embattled Christians in Syria and their protector, which happens to be the Assad government.

Fillon has the respectable look, as the French say, of a person who could take communion

without first going to confession. As a campaign theme he credibly stressed his virtuous capacity to oppose corruption.

Oops! On January 25, the semi-satirical weekly *Le Canard Enchaîné* fired the opening shots of an ongoing media campaign designed to undo the image of Mister Clean, revealing that his British wife, Penelope, had been paid a generous salary for working as his assistant. As Penelope was known for staying home and raising their children in the countryside, the existence of that work is in serious doubt. Fillon also paid his son a lawyer's fee for unspecified tasks and his daughter for supposedly assisting him write a book. In a sense, these allegations prove the strength of the conservative candidate's family values. But his ratings have fallen and he faces possible criminal charges for fraud.

The scandal is real, but the timing is suspect. The facts are many years old, and the moment of their revelation is well calculated to ensure his defeat. Moreover, the very day after the *Canard's* revelations, prosecutors hastily opened an inquiry. In comparison with all the undisclosed dirty work and unsolved blood crimes committed by those in control of the French State over the years, especially during its foreign wars, enriching one's own family may seem relatively minor. But that is not the way the public sees it.

Cui bono?

It is widely assumed that despite National Front candidate Marine LePen's constant lead in the polls, whoever comes in second will win the runoff because the established political class and the media will rally around the cry to "save the Republic!" Fear of the National Front as "a threat to the Republic" has become a sort of protection racket for the established parties, since it stigmatizes as unacceptable a large swath of opposition to themselves. In the past, both main parties have sneakily connived to strengthen the National Front in order to take votes away from their adversary.

Thus, bringing down Fillon increases the chances that the candidate of the now thoroughly discredited Socialist Party may find himself in the magic second position after all, as the knight to slay the LePen dragon. But who exactly is the Socialist candidate? That is not so clear. There is the official Socialist Party candidate, Benoît Hamon. But the independent spin-off from the Hollande administration, Emmanuel Macron, "neither right nor left", is gathering support from the right of the Socialist Party as well as from most of the neo-liberal globalist elite.

Macron is scheduled to be the winner. But first, a glance at his opposition on the left. With his ratings in the single digits, François Hollande very reluctantly gave into entreaties from his colleagues to avoid the humiliation of running for a second term and losing badly. The badly attended Socialist Party primary was expected to select the fiercely pro-Israel prime minister Manuel Valls. Or if not, on his left, Arnaud Montebourg, a sort of Warren Beatty of French politics, famous for his romantic liaisons and his advocacy of re-industrialization of France.

Again, surprise. The winner was a colorless, little-known party hack named Benoît Hamon, who rode the wave of popular discontent to appear as a leftist critic and alternative to a Socialist government which sold out all Holland's promises to combat "finance" and assaulted the rights of the working class instead. Hamon spiced up his claim to be "on the left" by coming up with a gimmick that is fashionable elsewhere in Europe but a novelty in French political discourse: the "universal basic income". The idea of giving every citizen an

equal handout can sound appealing to young people having trouble finding a job. But this idea, which originated with Milton Friedman and other apostles of unleashed financial capitalism, is actually a trap. The project assumes that unemployment is permanent, in contrast to projects to create jobs or share work. It would be financed by replacing a whole range of existing social allocations, in the name of “getting rid of bureaucracy” and “freedom of consumption”. The project would complete the disempowerment of the working class as a political force, destroying the shared social capital represented by public services, and splitting the dependent classes between paid workers and idle consumers.

There is scant chance that the universal income is about to become a serious item on the French political agenda. For the moment, Hamon’s claim to radicality serves to lure voters away from the independent left-wing candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon. Both are vying for support from greens and militants of the French Communist Party, which has lost all capacity to define its own positions.

The Divided Left

An impressive orator, Mélenchon gained prominence in 2005 as a leading opponent of the proposed European Constitution, which was decisively rejected by the French in a referendum, but was nevertheless adopted under a new name by the French national assembly. Like so many leftists in France, Mélenchon has a Trotskyist background (the Posadists, more attuned to Third World revolutions than their rivals) before joining the Socialist Party, which he left in 2008 to found the *Parti de Gauche*. He has sporadically wooed the rudderless Communist Party to join him as the *Front de Gauche* (the Left Front) and has declared himself its candidate for President on a new independent ticket called *La France insoumise* – roughly translated as “Insubordinate France”. Mélenchon is combative with France’s docile media, as he defends such unorthodox positions as praise of Chavez and rejection of France’s current Russophobic foreign policy. Unlike the conventional Hamon, who follows the Socialist party line, Mélenchon wants France to leave both the euro and NATO.

There are only two really strong personalities in this lineup: Mélenchon on the left and his adversary of choice, Marine LePen, on the right. In the past, their rivalry in local elections has kept both from winning even though she came out ahead. Their positions on foreign policy are hard to distinguish from each other: criticism of the European Union, desire to leave NATO, good relations with Russia.

Since both deviate from the establishment line, both are denounced as “populists” – a term that is coming to mean anyone who pays more attention to what ordinary people want than to what the Establishment dictates.

On domestic social policy, on preservation of social services and workers’ rights, Marine is well to the left of Fillon. But the stigma attached to the National Front as the “far right” remains, even though, with her close advisor Florian Philippot, she has ditched her father, Jean-Marie, and adjusted the party line to appeal to working class voters. The main relic of the old National Front is her hostility to immigration, which now centers on fear of Islamic terrorists. The terrorist killings in Paris and Nice have made these positions more popular than they used to be. In her effort to overcome her father’s reputation as anti-Semitic, Marine LePen has done her best to woo the Jewish community, helped by her rejection of “ostentatious” Islam, going so far as to call for a ban on wearing an ordinary Muslim

headscarf in public.

A runoff between Mélenchon and LePen would be an encounter between a revived left and a revived right, a real change from the political orthodoxy that has alienated much of the electorate. That could make politics exciting again. At a time when popular discontent with “the system” is rising, it has been suggested (by Elizabeth Lévy’s maverick monthly *Le Causeur*) that the anti-system Mélenchon might actually have the best chance of winning working class votes away from the anti-system LePen.

Manufacturing Consent

But the pro-European Union, pro-NATO, neoliberal Establishment is at work to keep that from happening. On every possible magazine cover or talk show, the media have shown their allegiance to a “New! Improved!” middle of the road candidate who is being sold to the public like a consumer product. At his rallies, carefully coached young volunteers situated in view of the cameras greet his every vague generalization with wild cheers, waving flags, and chanting “Macron President!!!” before going off to the discotèque party offered as their reward. Macron is the closest thing to a robot ever presented as a serious candidate for President. That is, he is an artificial creation designed by experts for a particular task.

Emmanuel Macron, 39, was a successful investment banker who earned millions working for the Rothschild bank. Ten years ago, in 2007, age 29, the clever young economist was invited into the big time by Jacques Attali, an immensely influential guru, whose advice since the 1980s has been central in wedding the Socialist Party to pro-capitalist, neoliberal globalism. Attali incorporated him into his private think tank, the Commission for Stimulating Economic Growth, which helped draft the “300 Proposals to Change France” presented to President Sarkozy a year later as a blueprint for government. Sarkozy failed to enact them all, for fear of labor revolts, but the supposedly “left” Socialists are able to get away with more drastic anti-labor measures, thanks to their softer discourse.

The soft discourse was illustrated by presidential candidate François Hollande in 2012 when he aroused enthusiasm by declaring to a rally: “My real enemy is the world of finance!”. The left cheered and voted for him. Meanwhile, as a precaution, Hollande secretly dispatched Macron to London to reassure the City’s financial elite that it was all just electoral talk.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/10/emmanuel-macron-france-president> After his election, Hollande brought Macron onto his staff. From there he was given a newly created super-modern sounding government post as minister of Economy, Industry and Digital affairs in 2014. With all the bland charm of a department store mannequin, Macron upstaged his irascible colleague, prime minister Manuel Valls, in the silent rivalry to succeed their boss, President Hollande. Macron won the affection of big business by making his anti-labor reforms look young and clean and “progressive”. In fact, he pretty much followed the Attali agenda.

The theme is “competitiveness”. In a globalized world, a country must attract investment capital in order to compete, and for that it is necessary to lower labor costs. A classic way to do that is to encourage immigration. With the rise of identity politics, the left is better than the right in justifying massive immigration on moral grounds, as a humanitarian measure. That is one reason that the Democratic Party in the United States and the Socialist Party in France have become the political partners of neoliberal globalism.

Together, they have changed the outlook of the official left from structural measures promoting economic equality to moral measures promoting equality of minorities with the majority.

Just last year, Macron founded (or had founded for him) his political movement entitled “*En marche!*” (Let’s go!) characterized by meetings with young groupies wearing Macron t-shirts. In three months he felt the call to lead the nation and announced his candidacy for President.

Many personalities are jumping the marooned Socialist ship and going over to Macron, whose strong political resemblance to Hillary Clinton suggests that his is the way to create a French Democratic Party on the U.S. model. Hillary may have lost but she remains the NATOland favorite. And indeed, U.S. media coverage confirms this notion. A glance at the ecstatic [puff piece by Robert Zaretsky in Foreign Policy](#) magazine hailing “the English-speaking, German-loving, French politician Europe has been waiting for” leaves no doubt that Macron is the darling of the trans-Atlantic globalizing elite.

At this moment, Macron is second only to Marine LePen in the polls, which also show him defeating her by a landslide in the final round. However, his carefully manufactured appeal is vulnerable to greater public information about his close ties to the economic elite.

Blame the Russians

For that eventuality, there is a preventive strike, imported directly from the United States. It’s the fault of the Russians!

What have the Russians done that is so terrible? Mainly, they have made it clear that they have a preference for friends rather than enemies as heads of foreign governments. Nothing so extraordinary about that. Russian news media criticize, or interview people who criticize, candidates hostile to Moscow. Nothing extraordinary about that either.

As an example of this shocking interference, which allegedly threatens to undermine the French Republic and Western values, the Russian news agency Sputnik interviewed a Republican member of the French parliament, Nicolas Dhuicq, who dared say that Macron might be “an agent of the American financial system”. That is pretty obvious. But the resulting outcry skipped over that detail to accuse Russian state media of “starting to circulate rumors that Macron had a gay extramarital affair” (*The EU Observer*, February 13, 2017). In fact this alleged “sexual slur” had been circulating primarily in gay circles in Paris, for whom the scandal, if any, is not Macron’s alleged sexual orientation but the fact that he denies it. The former mayor of Paris, Bertrand Delanoë, was openly gay, Marine Le Pen’s second in command Florian Philippot is gay, in France being gay is no big deal.

Macron is supported by a “very wealthy gay lobby”, Dhuicq is quoted as saying. Everyone knows who that is: Pierre Bergé, the rich and influential business manager of Yves Saint Laurent, personification of radical chic, who strongly supports surrogate gestation, which is indeed a controversial issue in France, the real controversy underlying the failed opposition to gay marriage.

The Deep State rises to the surface

The amazing adoption in France of the American anti-Russian campaign is indicative of a titanic struggle for control of the narrative – the version of international reality consumed by

the masses of people who have no means to undertake their own investigations. Control of the narrative is the critical core of what Washington describes as its “soft power”. The hard power can wage wars and overthrow governments. The soft power explains to bystanders why that was the right thing to do. The United States can get away with literally everything so long as it can tell the story to its own advantage, without the risk of being credibly contradicted. Concerning sensitive points in the world, whether Iraq, or Libya, or Ukraine, control of the narrative is basically exercised by the partnership between intelligence agencies and the media. Intelligence services write the story, and the mass corporate media tell it.

Together, the anonymous sources of the “deep state” and the mass corporate media have become accustomed to controlling the narrative told to the public. They don’t want to give that power up. And they certainly don’t want to see it challenged by outsiders - notably by Russian media that tell a different story.

That is one reason for the extraordinary campaign going on to denounce Russian and other alternative media as sources of “false news”, in order to discredit rival sources. The very existence of the Russian international television news channel RT aroused immediate hostility: how dare the Russians intrude on our version of reality! How dare they have their own point of view! Hillary Clinton warned against RT when she was Secretary of State and her successor John Kerry denounced it as a “propaganda bullhorn”. What *we* say is truth, what *they* say can only be propaganda.

The denunciation of Russian media and alleged Russian “interference in our elections” is a major invention of the Clinton campaign, which has gone on to infect public discourse in Western Europe. This accusation is a very obvious example of double standards, or projection, since U.S. spying on everybody, including its allies, and interference in foreign elections are notorious.

The campaign denouncing “fake news” originating in Moscow is in full swing in both France and Germany as elections approach. It is this accusation that is the functional interference in the campaign, not Russian media. The accusation that Marine Le Pen is “the candidate of Moscow” is not only meant to work against her, but is also preparation for the efforts to instigate some variety of “color revolution” should she happen to win the May 7 election. CIA interference in foreign elections is far from limited to contentious news reports.

In the absence of any genuine Russian threat to Europe, claims that Russian media are “interfering in our democracy” serve to brand Russia as an aggressive enemy and thereby justify the huge NATO military buildup in Northeastern Europe, which is reviving German militarism and directing national wealth into the arms industry.

In some ways, the French election is an extension of the American one, where the deep state lost its preferred candidate, but not its power. The same forces are at work here, backing Macron as the French Hillary, but ready to stigmatize any opponent as a tool of Moscow.

What has been happening over the past months has confirmed the existence of a Deep State that is not only national but trans-Atlantic, aspiring to be global. The anti-Russian campaign is a revelation. It reveals to many people that there really is a Deep State, a trans-Atlantic orchestra that plays the same tune without any visible conductor. The term “Deep State” is suddenly popping up even in mainstream discourse, as a reality that cannot

be denied, even if it is hard to define precisely.

Instead of the Military Industrial Complex, we should perhaps call it the Military Industrial Media Intelligence Complex, or MIMIC. Its power is enormous, but acknowledging that it exists is the first step toward working to free ourselves from its grip.

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