# PEOPLE'S NEWS

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## Yet another bank rip-off—facilitated by the Irish government

Strong evidence has emerged that Ireland is not only facilitating significant corporate tax avoidance by companies such as Apple but extends this generosity to large European banks, a number of which fleeced us during the financial crisis.

A study by Oxfam of Europe's twenty biggest banks—sixteen of which operate in Ireland—was made possible by new EU transparency rules, which require banks to publish information on the profit they make and the tax they pay in every country in which they operate.

The research found that a disproportionate amount of the profit of the biggest European banks is reported in Ireland, with these banks making more than €2.3 billion in profit here in 2015 on a turnover of €3 billion—a massive profitability rate of 76 per cent, which is four times higher than the global average. Only the Cayman Islands had a higher average profitability, with an astonishing 167 per cent.

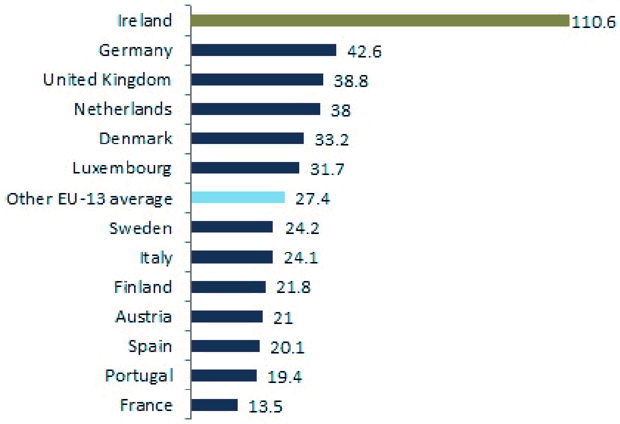
Ireland also appears to be a very productive site for European banks, with only the Cayman Islands, Curaçao and Luxembourg having a higher average profit per employee. An average employee in Ireland generated €409,000 in profit in 2015, more than nine times the world average. The Spanish bank BBVA stands out in this respect: while the bank's employees generated an average profit of €33,000 each, an average employee in Ireland generated €6.8 million—more than two hundred times as much.

The sixteen biggest European banks operating in Ireland examined in the research paid an average effective tax in Ireland of no more than 6 per cent—half the statutory rate of 12½ per cent—with three banks (Barclays, Royal Bank of Scotland, and Crédit Agricole) paying no more than 2 per cent.

Countries are being denied large amounts of potential tax revenue, thus contributing to inequality and poverty, as governments are forced to decide between increasing indirect taxes, such as value-added tax, which are paid disproportionately by ordinary people, and cutting public services, which has the greatest impact on the poorest.

At the same time, increased profits as a result of lower corporate tax create a benefit for wealthy companies' shareholders, further increasing the gap between rich and poor.

The cost to the Irish exchequer of loopholes that facilitate banks in paying such low rates of tax is rarely publicly documented and accounted for. For example, if the profits of Royal Bank of Scotland had been taxed at the statutory rate of 12½ per cent the bank would have paid €120 million in additional taxes, which would have paid for a lot of doctors, teachers, and care workers.




*Transnational profit per employee, 2009 (€ 000)*

Transparency measures, such as EU rules that make corporations publicly report on each country where they make their profits and pay their taxes, are vital tools in the global fight against tax-dodging. (The Irish government is opposed to the public element of this reporting.) However, a new proposal by the EU Commission designed to extend public reporting to all big companies needs to be enhanced. The proposal is limited to companies with a turnover of €750 million or more, a measure that would exclude up to 90 per cent of transnationals, and does not require companies to report on their activities in all the countries in which they operate, including developing countries.

The Oxfam report, "Opening the vaults: The use of tax havens by Europe's biggest banks," gives a breakdown of the bank data. More statistics from the report:

• Luxembourg and Ireland are the most favoured tax havens, accounting for 29 per cent of the profits that banks declared in tax havens in 2015.

• Banks often pay little or no tax on the profits they declare in tax havens. European banks paid no tax on €383 million of profit they declared in seven tax havens in 2015. In 2015, European banks declared at least €628 million in profits in tax havens where they employ nobody.

• Tax havens account for 26 per cent of the profits made by the twenty biggest European banks—an estimated €25 billion—but only 12 per cent of banks' turnover and 7 per cent of the banks' employees.

• Subsidiaries in tax havens are on average twice as lucrative as those elsewhere. For every €100 of activity, banks make €42 of profit in tax havens, compared with a global average of €19.

• Some banks are reporting profits in tax havens while reporting losses elsewhere. For example, Deutsche Bank registered low profits or even losses in many major markets in 2015 while making almost €2 billion in profits in tax havens.

## A look at NATO's web site

The degree to which co-operation between the European Union and NATO has grown during the last couple of years—with the active participation of the Irish government, and latterly with the participation of Enda Kenny in NATO-EU discussions at the EU Council meeting last December—is amply demonstrated by a cursory look at NATO's web site.

The following extracts illustrate the accelerated pace of co-operation between the EU and NATO. It is clear now that the putative EU army will be essentially a part of NATO—just like the old Western European Union, abolished by the Lisbon Treaty. The difference this time is that Ireland will be fully integrated in the alliance.

"Sharing strategic interests and facing the same challenges, NATO and the European Union (EU) cooperate on issues of common interest and are working side by side in crisis management, capability development and political consultations. The EU is a unique and essential partner for NATO. The two organisations share a majority of members and have common values" ("Relations with the European Union").

"At the NATO Summit in Warsaw in July 2016, the two organisations outlined areas for strengthened co-operation in light of common challenges to the east and south, including countering hybrid threats, enhancing resilience, defence capacity building, cyber defence, maritime security, and exercises."

These were included in the joint declaration issued by the secretary-general of NATO, the president of the EU Council, and the president of the EU Commission.

"Allied leaders underlined that the European Union remains a unique and essential partner for NATO. Enhanced consultations at all levels and practical co-operation in operations and capability development have brought concrete results. Over 40 measures to advance NATO-EU co-operation in agreed areas were approved by NATO foreign ministers in December 2016.

"NATO's current Strategic Concept, issued in November 2010, clearly states that an active and effective EU contributes to the overall security of the Euro-Atlantic area. The EU's Lisbon Treaty (in force since end 2009) provides a framework for strengthening the EU's capacities to address common security challenges."

NATO and the EU meet regularly to discuss issues of common interest. The secretary-general of NATO engages with his EU counterparts and on numerous occasions has addressed the EU Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, in joint session with the subcommittee on Security and Defence. Meetings also take place at the level of foreign ministers, ambassadors, military representatives, and defence advisers.

There are regular staff-to-staff talks at all levels between NATO's International Staff and International Military Staff and their EU counterparts (European External Action Service, European Defence Agency, EU Commission, and EU Parliament). Permanent military liaison arrangements have been established to facilitate co-operation at the operational level. A NATO Permanent Liaison Team at the EU Military Staff has been operating since 2005, and an EU Cell at SHAPE (NATO's strategic command for operations in Mons in Belgium) was set up in 2006.

The conclusions and common set of proposals emerging from the EU Council meeting in December are available in a document issued by the EU Council.

And all this is concealed from the Irish electorate through a process of smoke and mirrors while we become in effect a nominally militarily neutral but *de facto* member of NATO, along with Sweden and Finland.

It's time we all sat up and took notice before it's too late.

## Ireland continues to call for nuclear disarmament

Saying that the time was not right to outlaw nuclear arms, the United States led a group of some dozens of United Nations members that boycotted discussions on a treaty that would ban nuclear weapons.

The talks, supported by more than 120 countries, were first announced in October and are led by Austria, Brazil, Ireland, Mexico, South

Africa, and Sweden. Disarmament groups strongly support the effort.

The United States and most of the other nuclear powers, including Britain, France, and Russia, oppose the talks. The Obama government voted against convening them.

The US ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, questioned whether countries favouring a ban on nuclear weapons understood the nature of global threats. Referring to the countries participating in the talks, she said, "You have to ask yourself, are they looking out for their people?"

"Is it any surprise that Iran is in support of this?" she added.

However, it is heartening to see that Ireland continues to play a role in the struggle for nuclear disarmament, even as it draws closer to nuclear-armed NATO, whose members are implacably opposed.

## "Rome Declaration" lends support to further arms build-up

As expected, the "Rome Declaration," signed on 25 March by the heads of state or heads of government of the twenty-seven EU member-countries (without Britain) and by the presidents of the EU Council, Parliament, and Commission, reaffirms the intention of the EU to assume a more offensive political and military role in global policy.

"Taken individually, we would be side-lined by global dynamics," the document states. In the coming ten years "we want a Union [that has] the will and capacity of playing a key role in the world." The EU must therefore "assist in creating a more competitive and integrated defence industry" and be committed to "strengthening its common security and defence."

Several EU members, including Poland, the Netherlands, and the Baltic countries, still attach great importance to the transatlantic war alliance, particularly in view of Germany's predominance over the EU. NATO is explicitly mentioned in the Rome Declaration, albeit in restricted terms. In future, it says, the EU should act "also in co-operation and complementarity with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation." But the EU has priority.

But while acknowledging that the expansion of the EU's military ambition is "impressive," some German government advisers are continuing to apply pressure to speed up the EU's arms build-up. The Commission is not implementing its announced steps rapidly and vigorously enough, the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP) complains in a text published within the past fortnight. It made an initial concrete proposal, pleading for a "common defence programme for the next decade, dealing with missions, procurement, capabilities and counter-terrorism."

"Speaking of strength and responsibility will impress neither Moscow nor Washington," the DGAP further explains: many more practical activities must be undertaken. It makes a plea for a new German-French initiative for implementing the measures planned last summer.

Germany and France together account for about 40 per cent of the EU's defence and arms capacity. This is why, after France's presidential elections, they must give the signal that this theme will be pursued in the EU.

Germany and France should ensure that the EU is "equipped for around 40 billion euros," "so that it can develop a strong radiance" both "within the EU and beyond." In addition it proposes that the German army continue its initiative of integrating entire military formations from foreign countries. It has already integrated two-thirds of the Netherlands' military formations in its own units, within the framework of its co-operation with its armed forces. It has also begun to integrate a Czech and a Romanian brigade in German divisions.

Germany could launch "the creation of a European formation, a sort of Europe Division," the DGAP suggests. It could "gradually, by 2020, set up an additional approximately 20,000 strong division"—"and call on the European partners to participate."

The Hungarian minister of foreign affairs, Péter Szijjártó, has expressed his support for such a project. He can very well imagine, he says, "that we will set up even more multi-national units." However, the final decision on missions for these new units must remain with the separate states. Also, "European defence must be reinforced within the framework of transatlantic structures." If these conditions are met, Hungary, according to its foreign minister, "is one of the most ardent advocates of a common European army."


The EU Parliament is also pushing for more militarisation. With an eye on the EU's anniversary summit, it passed a resolution on foreign and military policy, calling, among other things, for setting up "more multinational European structures." It made a plea for the EU to cover "all EU Battlegroup costs . . . during the stand-up, standby and stand-down phases."

It added a proposal for a "Council format of Defence Ministers," under the presidency of the high representative for foreign affairs and security policy, Federica Mogherini, in order "to co-ordinate the implementation of the common security and defence policy (CSDP) and make it more efficient." In addition, according to the resolution, it is "essential to increase national defence expenditure to 2 per cent of EU GDP." This would mean "extra expenditure of nearly EUR 100 billion on defence by the end of the coming decade."

The joint rapporteur of the EU Parliament's resolution, Michael Gahler (German Christian Democrat) says he is now "looking forward" to "concrete proposals" for the implementation of these projects.

Whereas Germany and the EU Commission are insisting on the concrete implementation of the plan to create "European" armed forces, the Rome Declaration merely rehashed the propaganda phraseology intended to water down the EU's militarisation, speaking of a "community of peace, freedom, democracy," and "human rights."

There was no acknowledgement of the EU's origin. Supranational integration in Europe was originally pushed by the United States in the years following the Second World War to provide an economic underpinning for NATO in Europe. The first step to integration, the European Coal and Steel Community (1951), was brought into being at the behest of the United States to reconcile France to German rearmament at the start of the Cold War. The EU's actual historical origins were, in fact, in war preparations.

## More EU money for fisheries "control and compliance"—at the expense of coastal communities

€46.5 million out of the €147 million allocated to Irish fishing from the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund for the period 2014–2020 has already been set aside for "control and compliance." The Government is to match this allocation with another €90 million. This has prompted a Sinn Féin member of the EU Parliament, Liadh Ní Riada, to question why such a huge chunk has essentially been allocated to the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority.

"While any money being invested in the Irish fishing industry is to be welcomed I find it unusual that the largest chunk of the funding, over 30 per cent has been earmarked for control and compliance," she said. "Essentially this means it will go to the SFPA who seem far more interested in harassing Irish fishing boats than using their powers to tackle the scourge of super-trawlers in our waters.

"I am constantly receiving complaints from fishermen that the SFPA are spending an inordinate amount of time and energy meticulously checking their small vessels, while refusing to use their considerable powers to keep the super-trawlers that are churning up Irish waters in check. This money would have been far better used had the greater bulk of it been put towards the Fisheries Local Action Group (FLAGs) programme.

"The FLAGs programme is a community led diversification initiative that helps traditional fishing communities expand into areas such as tourism, heritage, aquaculture and other sectors so that they are not relying solely on an ever more stretched industry.


"It is of far more use to struggling coastal communities than a beefed up and over zealous SFPA. If this money must go to compliance and control then I hope that the SFPA will put it into resources that will allow them to do much more to keep a much tighter watch on the super-trawlers that are devastating these communities."

The Irish state is now a net contributor to the EU budget. In 2014 it became a net contributor for the first time, paying in €1.69 billion and receiving €1.52 billion. This means that money like this is in fact Irish taxpayers' money, recycled through Brussels, but with the EU rather than the Irish state determining how such money is to be distributed.

## So where is CETA now?

The EU's commissioner for trade, Cecilia Malmström, was in Canada recently for speeches and media events promoting Canada's trade agreement with the EU, the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement. Canada is preparing to provisionally apply it by 1 July.


After many delays, most of the agreement will take effect "within weeks," Malmström said. "We are ready on the European side."

After the successful ratification vote in February, the EU suggested it could be provisionally applied by 1 April. Malmström now says the agreement will enter into force within weeks. "We have done our work," she said. "We don't see any delays with this."

The legislation to bring Canada's laws and regulations into compliance is now before the

Foreign Affairs and Trade Committee of the Senate. A few clauses were tweaked, in mostly technical ways, during the committee review by the House of Commons.

There is no sign of senators holding it up, and the pressure is on to wrap this up before members of Parliament break for the summer. Then diplomatic notes will be exchanged, fixing a date for provisional application, probably no later than 1 July.

The agreement is being implemented in two stages: about 95 per cent of it now, the rest later. A few measures fall outside the EU Commission's purview, including the reworked investor court system. Latvia (where, coincidentally, Canadian troops are headed shortly on a NATO exercise) was the first country to ratify it. The Czech Republic may be next. Malmström said others will follow before summer.

"In a huge majority of countries, it will be no problem," she said. "There are a few countries where this is still controversial," but over time proponents will "show that CETA is not actually the end of democracy, it's a good deal. All member-countries have promised to do their utmost to get it ratified."

Ratifying the EU's trade deal with South Korea took more than four years.

In Ireland, it is now clear that Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael support the agreement, and it is likely that the "independents" will toe the line.

## French Constitutional Court launches investigation into CETA

Following a request in February by 153 elected public representatives, including 53 members of parliament, the Constitutional Court announced that it would delay its decision on the legality of the EU's free trade agreement with Canada. Something of a rarity, this report threatens the implementation of the agreement.

Opposition was strong in France but even more so in Germany and Austria.

The agreement was adopted by a large majority in the EU Parliament in February. In principle this should guarantee its rapid application, bringing it into force in the next few weeks; but the French government's sleight of hand in bypassing parliament on the ratification further angered its opponents.

Farmers continued to mobilise against CETA, but without success. The appeal to the Constitutional Court in February was a last-ditch effort to block the agreement, as there was no majority in the EU Parliament for a referral to the European courts.

Yet there is a real possibility that the agreement could be in breach of French law. According to one lawyer, Dominique Rousseau, the text does not conform to the French constitution, for a number of reasons.

The first is that it contravenes the principle of equality: the establishment of *ad hoc* dispute-settlement tribunals would offer different treatment to foreign and national investors. For Rousseau this also undermines national sovereignty by taking competence in certain areas from national jurisdictions. What's more, the precautionary principle does not appear in the agreement.

Taking heed of this warning, several organisations called on President François Hollande to delay the entry into force of the agreement, on the grounds that the Constitutional Court had yet to deliver its verdict. One organisation, the Nicolas Hulot Foundation for Nature and Humanity, said:

“The Council’s announcement that it is delaying this decision confirms our fears. The president should call an emergency EU Council summit to refuse the provisional entry into force of this deal, which could happen as early as 1 April, until all doubts about its compatibility with the French constitution have been allayed.”

French concerns over CETA were clear to see in the EU Parliament, where only 16 of its 74 members voted in favour of its adoption.

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## Reform of free movement of labour blocked

After a year of stalled negotiations, fresh changes to draft rules affecting workers temporarily sent to other EU countries are further deepening rifts between eastern and western member-states.

A new compromise draft from Malta, which at present holds the rotating presidency of the EU Council, has caused outrage among some eastern EU countries.

A group of countries, including Poland, Romania, and Hungary, has fiercely opposed any legal changes to the 21-year-old rule on posted workers and has called western EU member-states “protectionist” for pushing measures to raise pay for workers from lower-wage countries. Poland is putting up a fight over a forthcoming EU proposal that will affect working conditions for lorry drivers who travel between countries that have different social welfare laws and minimum wages.

The rules allow workers to be sent temporarily to another EU country but to still pay social contributions in their home country. But new changes to the draft bill have only stirred tensions between some member-states.

Transport workers are explicitly brought within the rules, and this has upset opposing countries, which argue that it is too hard to apply national employment law to drivers who pass through a country. Under the proposal from Malta, employers who send workers to other EU countries would also have to make sure their workers’ accommodation meets local standards.

France has been one of the most outspoken countries in pushing for legal change, citing a boom in low-wage workers coming to western Europe since the law was passed in 1996. After Germany, France hosts the second-highest number of temporarily posted workers in the EU. The number of posted workers in Germany mushroomed by 68 per cent between 2010 and 2015.

One hotly debated point still dividing countries is pay. Some diplomats say the term used, “remuneration,” is too vague and could force employers to pay a range of fees, in addition to wages, if they are required by the country where workers are temporarily sent. Remuneration is left up to national law in countries “to whose territory the worker is posted.” The Commission’s proposal from last year used the term “remuneration,” replacing references to “minimum rates of pay” from the 1996 directive.

Some diplomats from countries opposed to the proposal are protesting that the renaming could mean that employers will have to pay a huge amount of fees, which vary widely from country to country. As a possible vote in the EU Council approaches, countries in favour of the proposal are trying to swing the decision.

Maltese diplomats are considering changes to their draft that could help win over countries that are undecided on the bill. Ireland, Spain and Portugal want measures on subcontracted workers who are posted to other countries to be taken out of the draft. In effect, this would allow contractors to mainly subcontract in the majority of instances and avoid their obligations.

A French amendment to crack down on so-called letterbox companies, which use addresses in lower-wage EU countries to underpay workers, has been rejected. A French diplomat said that France will keep pushing for measures on such companies to be included in the draft bill before it goes to a vote in the EU Council.

## French "messiah" candidate ticks all the establishment boxes

The French presidential election in 2017 is shaping up to be a highly significant encounter between two profoundly opposed conceptions of political life. On one side, "governance," meaning the joint management of society by a co-opted elite, on the model of business corporations; on the other side, the traditional system called "democracy," meaning the people's choice of leaders by free and fair elections.

Traditional representative democracy is no longer considered appropriate for a globalised world based on the free circulation of capital. Instead, the favoured model is "governance," a word taken from the business world, which refers to the successful management of large corporations, united in a single purpose and aiming at maximum efficiency. The personification of this approach is the leading candidate for the French presidency, Emmanuel Macron.

The first way to spot the role assigned to Macron is simply to glance at the mass media: the endless magazine covers, puff pieces, platitudinous interviews, and never a word of criticism, whereas his leading rivals are systematically denigrated. In January the American journal *Foreign Policy* introduced its readers to Macron as "the English-speaking, German-loving French politician Europe has been waiting for."

His career path makes it clear why Western mainstream media are hailing Macron as the messiah.

Born in Amiens only thirty-nine years ago, Emmanuel Macron has spent a lot of his life in school. Like most of France's leaders, he was educated in some of the best of France's elite schools. The American media seem impressed by the fact that along the way he studied philosophy, which is no big deal in France.

In 2004 he passed the competitive examination to be admitted to the *Inspection Générale des Finances*, one of the corps of experts that have distinguished the French system since Napoleon. IGF inspectors have lifetime security and are assigned as economic advisers to government officials or private entities.

In the IGF, Macron gained the attention of the particularly well-connected senior official Jean-Pierre Jouyet, who recommended him to Jacques Attali, the most spectacular of the intellectual gurus who for the past thirty-five years has regaled French governments with his futuristic visions (Jerusalem as capital of a future world government, for example). In 2007 Attali co-opted Macron to his super-elite "Commission for the Liberation of Growth," authorised to provide guidance to the presidency. A star was born—a star of the business world.

The Attali commission prepared a list of 316 proposals explicitly designed to "install a new governance in the service of growth." In this context "growth" naturally means growth of profits, by way of measures that cut back the cost of labour, tearing down barriers to the movement of capital, and deregulation. The forty elite members planning the future of France included the heads of Deutsche Bank and the Swiss transnational Nestlé.


In 2008, on a recommendation from Attali, Macron was taken into the Rothschild Bank at a high level. By negotiating a Nestlé purchase worth €9 billion on which he received a substantial commission, Macron became a millionaire.

To what did he owe a successful rise that two centuries ago would have been a subject for a Balzac novel? He was "impressive," Attali recalls. He got along with everyone and "didn't antagonise anyone." Alain Minc, another star expert on everything, once put it this way: "Macron is smart, but above all, he makes a good banker, because he is 'charming'—a necessary quality for 'a whore's profession'."

Macron is famous for such words of wisdom as "What France needs is more young people who want to become billionaires" and "Who cares about programmes? What counts is vision." Macron has launched his career on the basis of his charm and "vision"; and he certainly has a clear vision of the way to the top.

This path is strewn with contacts. The governance elite operates by co-option. They recognise each other, they "smell each other out," they are of one mind. Of course, these days the thought police are quick to condemn talk of "governance" as a form of conspiracy theory; but there is no conspiracy, because there does not need to be. People who think alike act together. Nobody has to tell them what to do.

And people who decry every hint of "conspiracy" seem to believe that those who possess immense power, especially financial power, don't bother to use it. Instead they sit back and tell themselves, "Let the people decide." Like George Soros, for instance.

In reality, people with power not only use it but are convinced that they *should* use it, for the good of humanity, for the good of the world. They know best, so why should they leave momentous decisions up to the ignorant masses? That's why David Rockefeller founded the Trilateral Commission forty years ago, to work out how to deal with "too much democracy."

These days, ideologues keep the masses amused with arguments about themselves: which identity group they belong to, who is being unfair to whom, who it is they must "hate" for the crime of "hating." Meanwhile the elite meet among themselves and decide what is best.

Thanks to Jouyet, in 2007 Macron was co-opted to a club called *Les Gracques* (after the Roman Gracchus brothers), devoted to "values" based on recognition that the Keynesian welfare state doesn't fit globalisation and the development of the European Union.

In 2011 Macron was co-opted to the *Club de la Rotonde*, which undertook to advise President Hollande to hit France with a "competitiveness shock": favouring investment by lowering public expenses and labour costs.

In 2012 Macron was welcomed into the French-American Foundation, known for selecting the "young leaders" of the future.

In 2014 Macron made it to the really big time. On 31 May and 1 June of that year he attended the annual Bilderberg meeting, held in Copenhagen. This super-secret gathering of "governance" designers was formed in 1954 by Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands. No journalists are allowed into the Bilderberg gathering, but leading press barons are there to agree on the consensus that must be spun to the masses.

With all these credentials, Macron went from being an economic adviser to François Hollande to being minister of economy, finance and digital industry in the government of Manuel Valls, where he vigorously promoted the Attali agency on the pretext of promoting "growth." Among other things, he reversed the position of his predecessor by approving the sale of the crown jewel of French industry, the Alstom energy sector, responsible for France's nuclear power industry, to General Electric.

As minister, Macron was responsible for the most unpopular measures of the entire unpopular Hollande presidency. His so-called "Macron Law," featuring massive deregulation, conformed to EU directives but was unable to win a majority in parliament and had to be adopted by resorting to article 49.3 of the constitution, which allows the prime minister to adopt a law without a vote.

His next accomplishment was more veiled. He designed the "reform" (i.e. partial dismantling) of French labour law, presented to the public as the El Khomri Law, named after the young minister of labour, Myriam El Khomri. She had virtually nothing to do with "her" law except to put an acceptable face and an "ethnic diversity" name on wildly unpopular legislation that sent protesting workers into the streets for weeks, split the Socialist Party, and obliged Valls to resort once again to article 49.3 to pass it into law.

Here the story becomes almost comical. Macron's slash-and-burn dash through the Hollande-Valls government virtually destroyed the French Socialist Party, leaving it divided and demoralised. This opened the way for Macron to emerge as the heroic champion of "the future," "neither left nor right," "the France of winners," in his new party, *En Marche* (which can mean "it's working").

Macron has now risen to the top of the opinion polls, neck and neck with Marine Le Pen, for the first round on 23 April and so the favourite to challenge her in the decisive second round on 7 May.

Being "charming" ensured Macron a successful career as a banker; and the sycophantic mass media are doing their best to ensure him the presidency, mainly on the strength of his youthful "charm."

As never before, the press and television, from which most people get their news, have become not only unanimous in their choice and unscrupulous in their methods but tyrannical in their condemning of independent news sources as "fake" and "false." Objectivity is a thing of the past.

Eleven candidates are running for the office of president of the French Republic. The media lavish admiring attention on Macron, treat his serious rivals as delinquents, toss a few bones to sure losers, and ignore the rest. Backed by the media, Macron is the candidate of authoritarian governance, against French democracy itself.

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