

May Day marchers in Paris speak on the French elections

A WSWWS reporting team
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At the demonstration May 1 against the extreme right in Paris reporters from the World Socialist Web Site spoke to a number of the protesters.

Gilles, a theatre director from Orleans, said, "Perhaps the Socialist Party did not know how to advance its ideas. Of course, it plays a role in the whole political game, and it is condemned to take part in a terrible system. I would be interested in an analysis of whether Le Pen really won more votes than in 1995. Or whether it was the abstention that increased his vote, and the dispersal of votes [among the left parties]. I don't know the numbers.

"There is an absence of ideas. Perhaps that will come out of this; how to make a more collective world, a world with more solidarity. There hasn't been enough discussion about that.

"The parties have played with fire, all this law-and-order talk, even the left parties. And that's not right, even in an election campaign. It's dangerous. I come from Orleans and we have had problems with crime, but repression will solve nothing. But where are the ideas? And the idea of simply voting against something [Le Pen] makes me unhappy. It diminishes democracy.

"I agree with you, that to vote for Chirac means accepting responsibility for what he does. Are we going to have any serious change in society by doing that?

"The first cause of the vote for Le Pen is the social, economic and cultural misery. I think you will have a political polarization, the extreme right and the extreme left. The center is perhaps finished in France."

Antoine, a mechanical engineer, told the WSWWS: "The Le Pen vote pained me a great deal. I was very disturbed by the thought that so many people were closed, against immigrants, against others. It really scared me. I thought I had to do something. Le Pen makes me very frightened. I'm disturbed at the thought that people fall for this monstrous system. His ideas are monstrous. He proposes a society that I cannot accept.

"It's not the people who voted for Le Pen that we have to fight, it's his ideas. The people who voted for Le Pen voted for a man with dangerous ideas, for all sorts of reasons. I am going to vote for Chirac, so that Le Pen will not get in. Without enthusiasm. I think in the second round one has no responsibility for the person one votes for. In the first round, yes. But in the second round, we have no choice."

Daniel, an Algerian-born teacher, said, "I think the demonstration today is indispensable, but it is not by voting for Jacques Chirac next Sunday that anything will change. The

institutions of the Fifth Republic are finished. Le Pen has no right to present himself in the elections. He is an anti-democrat, a xenophobe.

"Voting for Chirac is no alternative. He is an undemocratic figure. I think we have to reform the constitution, make it more democratic. People express themselves in the street. We have to create a system where people can participate. I saw your slogan for a boycott of the elections, that's why I took the leaflet."

Jean said, "The Communist Party is dead. We have to have a new, alternative, radical left to lead the way into the future. My hope is that a radicalism, more or less revolutionary, will develop in France. With people from the LCR, Lutte Ouvrière, and people who are not members of any organization.

"One must have no illusions in social democracy, none. The SP and the CP are responsible for the situation. Did the CP oppose the privatization of public services while they were in the government? Yes or no? They fought for sports, but are sports the most important thing in society? There are people living in poverty, and the CP leaders worry about themselves and their own careers. It's clear. I would never vote for Chirac."

Jacqueline, a doctor, told the WSWWS: "Well, I think the problem was people voting for all sorts of left parties, unrealistically. They were dreaming about something, but in the meantime Jospin and the Socialist Party were voted out. This is the result of that kind of thing.

"I think the far left is partly responsible for the present situation. I think the policies of the government are also partly responsible. There are people who are dissatisfied, who wanted to show that. I think people are also not well enough informed. They don't understand the difference between a presidential and a legislative election, that every vote is important. Not to vote opened the door for the National Front.

"Le Pen is someone evil, who responds to the present crisis of society, to the loss of values, to the fear of foreigners that exists in France. I think he is a real danger on the educational sphere, in the cultural. I think we must block his way. We perhaps underestimate the insecurity growing in the working class suburbs, and we live in a little socialist cocoon. We haven't taken into account sufficiently the misery there. It was a vote from fear.

"I will vote Chirac. I will hope for better things in the legislative elections. It is a mathematical calculation. To void one's ballot is to leave a small opening for Le Pen. I think it's logical enough. In any case, I'm not one of those who will find it catastrophic if

Chirac wins. It's not a challenge to my convictions."

Pierre, a student, said, "I would not vote for Chirac. I would almost vote for Le Pen, just to shake things up. Well, I wouldn't. I'm on the extreme left.

"For a week, there's been talk about the fight against the extreme right. But now the words have changed, and they speak of fighting 'extremism.' That's not the same thing at all. They want to straitjacket people. If Le Pen were elected, he wouldn't last two weeks. He would be thrown out in less than two weeks. The election of Le Pen wouldn't change anything. I'm against the present system, the way people work, the neo-liberalism.

"People say to vote for Chirac out of fear, out of fear of Le Pen and fascism. But fascism couldn't take power in France. It's impossible, morally, technically. The purpose of the demonstration organizers is to keep people with Chirac and neo-liberalism.

"At the moment there is no alternative. The alternative in the first round was to vote for the far left. The Socialist Party defends the interests of the rich. The alternative? Revolution."

Dominique, a designer, said, "I wept when I heard the results of the election. I thought, what have we come to? What has France come to, when 17 percent could vote for Le Pen?

"We have to vote for Chirac. The struggle will come afterward. It is an emergency. The house is on fire. We have no choice. It is perhaps excessive, but I think it's true. I know the history. When Le Pen was at 1 or 2 percent, people said, never, never. And now he is at 17 percent! One day, he'll be in power.

"I know that not all the Le Pen voters were voting for fascism. I understand that, but I wonder whether people think at all. People are afraid, of foreigners, globalization. I understand that people are insecure, but to vote for a fascist party, I will never understand that. That's inconceivable. If there is a 30 percent vote for Le Pen, it will be monstrous."

Ali, a Tunisian-born parks department worker for the city of Paris, told the WWS: "The political situation is terrible. They've done what they've never done before. I have colleagues at work who vote for the National Front. Before they didn't talk about it, now they talk about it openly.

"They're not racists, these are people I work with every day, I know them. But they are fed up, they've had it. I don't agree with them personally, but they're free to do what they like. But what is terrible is that we're supposed to vote for Chirac to stop Le Pen.

"It is not an alternative. You have him for five years, and he is a reactionary figure. What can you do? The unions too are a problem. And the Communist Party is complaining, but they have to accept the consequence of being in the government, they are paying the price too.

"I was born in Tunisia. My children are born here. People complain about the foreigners. But there are lots of people who come here who love this country, who are not jerks. There are problems everywhere."

Sabrina, 24, a Moroccan-born maintenance worker at a university, said, "What I think about the political situation is that France is unraveling. Fascism is growing because of fears about crime. The problem is real, but Le Pen is manipulating the issue. All of us must live together, Arab, black, French, because we are all human.

"Not all the people who voted for Le Pen are racists. There are people in the French middle class who are worried about crime and problems like that. It is fear that engenders racism, xenophobia, that's it. The unemployment rate also, people are afraid.

"The Socialist government didn't do much, that's for sure. I think we should have one left candidate. The left is not organized. Ecology is the issue for me, the future of the planet."

Two young people distributing leaflets for the anti-globalization movement, ATTAC, took our leaflet and returned several minutes later.

The first explained, "We are not in ATTAC, but they know us in the organization and we help out. ATTAC is a bit more for reformism, and we are more radical. It is obvious that we are for an appeal for a boycott of the second round, so that there will be genuine democracy—which doesn't exist at present.

"We are for the annulment of this election and for going beyond the demagoguery, so that there will be real concrete proposals and we can get away from the theme of insecurity or security [law and order], which is not the central issue.

"The real problem today is the economy, how to fight against poverty rather than a demagogic campaign to say 'No' to fascism, while leaving society as it is, and taking some half-measures.

"We don't accept the attempt to intimidate the people with propaganda, which says, 'You must accept Chirac in order not to vote for Le Pen.' That's intolerable"

The second ATTAC supporter went on, "To fight against fascism at a certain point there has to be an attack on poverty. And I don't believe for one second that Chirac will be the one to attack poverty. Neither Chirac nor Le Pen—there, starting from that, I refuse, I boycott. And I reject the idea that 'democracy' imposes on me a choice between one or the other.

"I'm a citizen, I choose what I wish as the future. Therefore, if the choice doesn't please me, I don't take it.

"We understand people who are panicking. But I don't think it is necessary to jump on the people who voted for Le Pen and say: 'You are Nazis, you are evil.' There is a reason for this vote and we have to attack the reason. The vote for Le Pen is only a symptom."



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