Comment on the French parliamentary elections

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The following comment was submitted to the WSWS by a reader in France in the aftermath of the second round of the French parliamentary elections June 16.

As this is written, only estimations are available of the results of the second round of the legislative elections held in France on Sunday, June 15.

The first lesson of this vote is the very high abstention rate. After the victory of Chirac on May 5 (with a score of 82.15 percent—worthy of a banana republic), obtained thanks to the mobilization of the left and the far left, 39 percent of the voters refused to choose between the right and the governmental left.

This record abstention signals a massive rejection of official politics as a whole and especially the left after 14 years of the Mitterrand presidency and five years of the Jospin government. It is significant, from this standpoint, that Martine Aubry, who introduced the 35-hour week, and Robert Hue, who supported every law attacking social conditions, both lost their seats.

The second lesson of this vote is the number of right-wing deputies. Whereas in the presidentials, Chirac himself won only 19,88 percent—a loss of 682,398 votes compared to 1995—and the UDF (Union for French Democracy) lost 2,256,670 votes, the right will have 400 seats, 380 for the UMP (Gaullist-led Union for a Presidential Majority—replacement for the RPR created the day after the presidential election). Chirac's party alone gets 65 percent of the seats, a record high since the establishment of the Fifth Republic in 1958. The system of majority voting clearly worked against the left, who paid dearly for Jospin's defeat and its unconditional support for Chirac on April 21.

The third lesson of this election is the extreme bipolarization of the National Assembly, to the detriment of all other political forces. The UMP and the PS (Socialist Party) have virtually hijacked the funds for the financing of political parties and groups represented in the parliament: 45,398 euros per elected representative in 2001. The absence or the marginal representation of the other political organizations will weigh heavily over the five years of Chirac's presidency, as social forces will be expressed outside parliament. These last elections have opened a political crisis on top of the economic and social crisis that has been undermining France for 30 years.

Faced with the disarray of the PCF and the defeat of the PS, workers and the millions of unemployed, poor and marginalized need a party that represents their class interests not only in France, but also in Europe and in the world. This task is urgent, since without a political response the working class knows that it will pay heavily for the failure of the governmental left.

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