

# French “left” defeated in parliamentary elections

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Five weeks after Socialist Party (SP) candidate Ségolène Royal lost the presidential elections, the French “left” has suffered another humiliating defeat.

After the first round of the legislative elections on Sunday, it is already clear that President Nicolas Sarkozy will command an overwhelming majority in the new National Assembly. His Gaullist UMP (Union for a Popular Movement) will control at least two thirds of the delegates. Sarkozy has for some time been the standard bearer of the right wing of the UMP, and is pledged to take dramatic steps in dismantling the French welfare state.

The exact composition of the new parliament will be determined next Sunday in a runoff election between the top vote-getters in all constituencies where no candidate received more than 50 percent of the vote in the first round.

While the two rounds of the presidential elections witnessed unusually large turnouts—84 and 85 percent respectively—massive abstention was a major factor in Sunday’s vote. Of the total electorate, 39.6 percent stayed at home, a record abstention for the first round of a parliamentary election since the establishment of the Fifth Republic in 1958. Evidently, it was mainly the “left” parties that were unable to mobilise their supporters.

Sunday’s result in some ways recalls that of the last parliamentary election, in 2002, when the UMP, then led by Jacques Chirac, won a large majority. The UMP victory in the 2002 legislative vote followed Chirac’s successful bid for a new term as president, under conditions in which the official “left” parties campaigned for him against his opponent in the second round, Jean-Marie Le Pen of the far-right National Front. The Socialist, Communist and Green parties called for a vote for Chirac, the candidate of French big business, portraying him as the defender of French democracy, while the so-called “far left” parties joined, either openly or tacitly, in the stampede for Chirac.

In the legislative elections that followed, Chirac won a big majority in parliament. This time, the presidential majority will likely be even bigger.

The UMP received 39.5 percent of the vote, compared to

33.3 percent in 2002. A total of 104 UMP candidates polled over 50 percent and won election outright.

Projections for the second round give the UMP between 383 and 501 seats in the 577-seat Assembly. At present, the Gaullists have 359 seats, plus 29 of the former UDF (Union for French Democracy), which was allied with the UMP in the 2002 election.

The Socialist Party obtained 24.7 percent of the vote, almost the same percentage as in 2002. Only one Socialist Party candidate gained more than 50 percent.

Together with its allies in the PRG (Left Radical Party) and the MRC (Citizens Movement, headed by Jean-Pierre Chevènement), the Socialist Party is expected to end up with 80 to 140 deputies. There are 149 SP deputies in the current parliament.

The Communist Party (CP) fared somewhat better than predicted, but nevertheless polled lower than in 2002. It received 4.29 percent of the vote—0.5 percent less than in 2002, but much more than the 1.9 percent scored by its presidential candidate, Marie-George Buffet.

Despite the fact that the CP concluded no electoral pact with the SP and faced, particularly in its traditional strongholds in the “red belt” around Paris, an aggressive campaign from SP candidates, it might still retain between 9 and 15 deputies, compared to its present total of 21.

It will lose, however, its status as an official parliamentary group. In the post-war history of France, the CP had always enjoyed official status in parliament—the only exception being 1958, when Charles de Gaulle came to power.

Frédéric Dabi of the polling organization IFOP called the CP’s loss of party status in parliament “a cataclysm” financially and in terms of the party’s public visibility. “It’s going to transform it even more into a mere small group,” he said.

The CP lost some of its traditional constituencies, including the Fourth Constituency in Marseilles which it has held since the Popular Front government of 1936.

With a total of 35.6 percent, the Socialist Party and its former allies in the “Plural Left” (the CP, Greens, PRG and

MRC) obtained about the same result as in 2002.

A total of 890,000 votes went to the parties of the so-called “far left.” This represents 3.4 percent of the vote, about 1 percent more than five years ago. Due to the majority voting system, the “far left” candidates have no chance of obtaining representation in parliament.

François Bayrou’s new center party, the MoDem (Democratic Movement), polled 7.6 percent, less than half of Bayrou’s result (18 percent) in the first round of the presidential elections. It is uncertain whether Bayrou will be returned to the Assembly next Sunday, and his party is not expected to win more than 4 seats. It could end up empty-handed.

The National Front’s result of 4.29 percent was its lowest since the early 1980s. Many of its traditional voters had been “siphoned off” by Sarkozy’s racist, law-and-order, patriotic demagogy. Only Jean-Marie Le Pen’s daughter, Marine Le Pen, standing in the industrially devastated constituency of Hénin-Beaumont in northern France, made it through to the second round.

The daily *Libération*, which supported Royal’s presidential bid, attributed the success of the UMP to the supposed genius of Sarkozy. It wrote, “This three-quarters-accomplished victory is the result of an impeccable job by Sarkozy: A vigorous campaign on a clearly right-wing programme, pugnacious language softened here and there by solicitude for his opponent, then his government’s initial decisions, complementing the [UMP’s legislative election] campaign—although the measures play fast and loose with the public finances and primarily favour the wealthiest of the new president’s supporters.”

While this explains very little, it does contain a grain of truth. Sarkozy is a conscious, vigorous and resolute fighter for the interests of the class he represents. Ségolène Royal, her partner and Socialist Party leader François Hollande, and all the other “elephants” of the SP look with derision and contempt at the class whose interests they claim to represent. They are not fighters, but miserable opportunists, always adapting themselves to the right wing. They feel much closer to the wealthy and the influential than to the workers and ordinary people, never mind the youth and immigrants in the urban suburbs. They have no fundamental disagreements with Sarkozy, whom they secretly admire.

If Sarkozy faced a serious political opposition, he would rapidly be reduced to a somewhat comical figure, consumed by ambition and vanity.

As soon as the result of the first round was known, Royal turned to Bayrou and his right-liberal MoDem, offering an alliance. Julien Dray, spokesman for Royal’s presidential campaign, declared Monday that his party would not “stand in the way of the MoDem candidates,” in the interests of

creating “the conditions for a pluralist parliament.” Royal said she would contact Bayrou before the second round.

Both Royal and Hollande blamed the youth and the working class, rather than their own lack of any meaningful perspective for the mass of the population, for the high abstention rate. Calling for a mobilisation next Sunday, Royal arrogantly declared, “You, the youth, you must come and vote for yourselves. You, the young people who stayed at home ... There’s a record abstention rate, whereas there was a civic awakening in the presidential elections ... There’s something wrong, but I’m not putting all the blame on you, of course.”

She added sanctimoniously, “There are men and women in the world who are risking their lives to gain the right to vote.” Hollande pontificated, “Often it’s the youth and the working class people who are more vulnerable to abstention.”

UMP leader Patrick Devedjian contemptuously, but correctly, pointed out that “abstention hit the left rather than the right,” because “the left has no project ... They only campaigned against Sarkozy’s project.”

Marie-Georges Buffet of the Communist Party, as well as the “far left” Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (Revolutionary Communist League—LCR), have spoken out against a deal with the MoDem, but are openly (the CP) or tacitly (the LCR) backing the Socialist Party.

A statement posted on the web site of the LCR says: “We must beat the right and the far right and defeat as many of their candidates (UMP, MoDem, New Centre, MPF, National Front) as possible.” The clear implication is a call to vote SP. Just as in 2002, the LCR is acting to prevent the working class from breaking from the Socialist Party.

Arlette Laguiller of Lutte Ouvrière offers no political perspective at all, and merely appeals to trade union militancy: “If [UMP Prime Minister] François Fillon has a free hand in the National Assembly, he does not have it in the country ... The world of labour is unpredictable because it can be subject to sudden bursts of anger ... It has shown this in the past, and the slightest small strike, if ignored, can, in some circumstances, spread like wildfire.”

This is typical of this “far left” organization’s evasion of the great political and historical issues confronting the working class, which goes hand in hand with political adaptation to the trade union bureaucracy and prostration before the parties of the official “left.”



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