

Polls show dead heat in first round of French presidential election

Alex Lantier in Paris
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Polls were flat before the first round of the French presidential elections, which will take place on Sunday, April 22. They suggest that Socialist Party (PS) candidate François Hollande and incumbent President Nicolas Sarkozy will get the most votes, advancing to the May 6 second round run-off vote.

Most recent polls showed Hollande leading or in a statistical dead heat with Sarkozy in the first round. An April 18-19 Ipsos poll showed Hollande with 29 percent of the vote and Sarkozy with 25.5 percent. It gave the next three leading candidates as neo-fascist Marine Le Pen (16 percent), Left Front candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon (14 percent), and conservative “centrist” candidate François Bayrou (10 percent). Hollande currently is expected to win comfortably in a runoff against Sarkozy, with 56 percent of the vote.

Pollsters cite high abstention rates, expected to be 25 to 30 percent, as a factor that might shift the vote totals Sunday night away from those predicted in polls. The vote for the neo-fascist National Front has often proved to be a wild card; it was 3.3 percent higher than forecast in 2002, and 3.4 percent lower than forecast in 2007. Le Pen is not currently expected to advance to the second round, however.

Sarkozy and Hollande are now calculating how they will try to get votes from the smaller parties on the second round.

In an interview with business daily *Les Echos*, Bayrou—a right-wing candidate who has criticized Sarkozy for appealing to the neo-fascist vote—said that he would not endorse either candidate. He said he expected to be “useful” if “a crisis erupts.” If Hollande won, Bayrou continued, he expected the first government Hollande would form after legislative elections in June would collapse, and that Hollande might make him prime minister.

Le Pen also declined to endorse either candidate, saying it was “useless” to vote for Sarkozy because polls showed him “losing the first round and then the second.” She denounced Hollande and Sarkozy as “twins, even Siamese twins,” cultivating a “destructive free-market utopia.”

Mélenchon has consistently said he would support whatever bourgeois “left” candidate comes in first—in other words, Hollande. Over 70 percent of his voters are expected to vote for Hollande in the run-off, though the PS has made clear that it intends to adopt austerity measures and ignore the demands of Mélenchon and the Left Front.

On Tuesday, former PS Prime Minister Laurent Fabius ruled out PS negotiations with Mélenchon, saying, “We will vote for the program of the person who wins.” Fabius made clear the PS campaign was stepping away from some campaign promises and proposals Hollande made to appeal to Left Front voters.

He cited the “degraded” economic climate, saying that the PS would “take it into account” when considering spending measures that Hollande promised in the first 100 days of his presidency. These proposals included a three-month freeze on gas prices and halting public sector job cuts. Fabius also dismissed a proposal to limit boss-to-worker pay ratios to 20-to-1, claiming it was “impractical” in the private sector, and ruled out increasing taxes on luxury goods as contrary to “European legislation.”

What is thus being prepared is a second round between two virtually indistinguishable big business candidates. They are both pledged to slash budget deficits to zero—by 2016 for Sarkozy, and by 2017 for Hollande—which requires at least €115 billion (US\$152 billion) in spending cuts and tax increases. Both candidates have pledged to achieve the bulk of these

savings through spending cuts (three-quarters for Sarkozy, and at least 60 percent for Hollande).

Both candidates have also pledged to keep France inside NATO's integrated military command, highlighting their support for continuing France's participation in US-led wars in the Middle East and Africa. Significantly, Hollande said yesterday that he would support French participation in an international military intervention against Syria if it had UN approval. (See "Paris 'Friends of Syria' meeting: Imperialist powers prepare for war against Syria".)

Though the financial aristocracy is preparing instruments for a speculative attack against French state debt—a week ago, the Eurex subsidiary of the German stock market created a new type of futures contract for this purpose—it is not because they object to a Hollande victory.

Yesterday, the daily *Libération* quoted the chief economist of a Parisian bank: "The question is not whether markets vote left or right. What moves them is uncertainty more than political programs." *Libération* commented in its editorial, "The markets, if they become nervous after the second round, will not be testing Hollande, but France."

That is to say, the banks know that Hollande is on their side just as much as Sarkozy, but the deep social cuts they intend to make have no support in the French population. Indeed, the financial panics and speculative attacks which their exotic financial instruments seek to create have precisely the goal of manufacturing a crisis atmosphere in which the next president can push for such cuts, despite mass popular opposition.

This underscores the basic reality of the French elections: with the bourgeois "left" largely indistinguishable from the right, the working class is disenfranchised by a political vacuum on the left. As vicious attacks on the workers and great class battles are being prepared, the working class can defend its interests only by creating a new, politically independent socialist movement.

While it has issued criticisms of Hollande, the Left Front, is of all the minor parties, is most closely aligned to one of the major bourgeois parties—in this case, the PS. Its appeal was based implicitly on the claim that it could facilitate a PS victory and then pressure the PS for left-wing policies. This illusion will be starkly exposed in coming months, as the incoming president,

of whatever party, carries out deep attacks against the working class.

Absent the creation of a politically independent movement in the working class, the main beneficiary of the treachery of the Left Front and the PS will be the neo-fascist Le Pen, who cynically poses as a critic and opponent of austerity policies. In her April 7 meeting in Lyon, she claimed to be the "only anti-system candidate," denouncing the "golden fascism" of the banks.



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