

# Defeat in French municipal elections staggers ruling Socialist Party

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The advance of the neo-fascist National Front (FN) and the prospect of massive losses of Socialist Party (PS) town halls in the final round of the French municipal elections tomorrow has thrown the ruling PS into a panic.

Many PS officials or local councillors are calling for the sacking of PS Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault and a complete cabinet reshuffle by PS President François Hollande. Both Hollande and Ayrault have record low popularity ratings of around 27 percent. In polls, over 69 percent want the president to change the government, hated and despised by workers and youth for its wars, austerity policies, and attacks on democratic rights.

Of France's over 36,000 *communes* or municipalities, the FN presented 562 lists in towns of over 1,000 inhabitants. It has the necessary 10 percent of the vote in 229 *communes* to qualify for the second round where it will be in three-cornered contests with the bourgeois "left" and the UMP.

This is nearly double the FN's previous high point, when in 1995 it qualified for the second round in 116 municipalities. In the 1990s the FN took over 4 town halls—Marignane, Orange, Toulon and Vitrolles—which were a disaster for the party's image, with big rises in municipal tax rates and town hall debts and, in the case of Toulon and Vitrolles indictment for the misuse of public funds. The FN subsequently lost all of these town halls. In addition to a straight first round win for the FN list with 50.26 percent of the vote in Hénin-Beaumont in northern France, a former mining town and PS stronghold for 60 years, the FN is expected to take over the town halls in Fréjus, Saint-Gilles, Forbach, and Béziers.

Because the FN does not have the forces to field lists throughout the country, its total share of the vote

nationally, according to the Ministry of the Interior, was only 4.5 percent. However, it is set to surpass its target of over 1,000 councilors, a large advance on its 80 councilors elected in the last municipal elections in 2008.

In an attempt to salvage its position, the PS is issuing appeals to the right-wing Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) of former President Nicolas Sarkozy, falsely claiming a so-called "Republican Front" alliance will block the rise of the FN.

Most PS lists accepted the leadership's call to stand down in favour of the UMP in three-way run-offs involving the PS, the UMP, and FN candidates. There were only a few exceptions, such as Béziers—where PS officials objected that UMP candidate Elie Aboud was indistinguishable from FN-backed candidate Robert Ménard.

This will do nothing to halt the rise of the FN, however. Not only has the PS been largely rebuffed by the UMP, but broad sections of the bourgeoisie, including layers of the media close to the PS, are moving to integrate the FN as an integral part of mainstream bourgeois politics, as the entire ruling elite shifts drastically to the right. UMP president Jean-François Copé, as well as leading UMP members such as ex-prime ministers François Fillon and Alain Juppé refused the PS' proposed Republican Front manoeuvre, however. It would have meant standing down in three-cornered second round contests where PS lists were better placed to beat the FN.

Many UMP members favour working with the FN—the Droite Populaire (Popular Right) tendency which openly calls for it is the UMP's biggest faction. On March 25, the pro-PS daily *Le Monde* endorsed Marine Le Pen's claims that last Sunday's results in the first round of the municipal elections mean "the end

of the two-party system” between the PS and the UMP. It cited her claims that the rise of the FN spelled the end of the “false choice between the right and the left,” and that the FN had “become a big, autonomous force.” *Le Monde* agreed, “Marine Le Pen is winning her bet: that of imposing her party as the third force on the political scene and to install it in the regions.” *Le Matin* ’s March 25 headline read, “The FN is on the way to looking like a party of government.”

These comments reflect the fact that the French bourgeois “left,” together with the right-wing UMP, has vigorously pursued policies of social counterrevolution and adopted many policies taken from the political arsenal of the far right. It supported Islamophobic laws against the veil and the burqa, and brutal imperialist wars in Libya, Syria, Mali, and the Central African Republic.

PS Interior Minister Manuel Valls’ calls for mass deportation of undocumented immigrants and his call for the entire Roma ethnic group to leave France reflect the fact that, within the PS’ social base, there are forces that support policies that a neo-fascist regime would enthusiastically implement.



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