

The European elections in France

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For months, opinion polls in France have been forecasting a victory for the far-right National Front (FN) in Sunday's European elections. The latest surveys place the FN at between 21 and 23 percent, just ahead of the conservative Union for a Popular Movement (UMP), with 20-21 percent, and clearly in front of the governing Socialist Party (17-18 percent). If the polls are correct, the FN would become the strongest party for the first time in a national election in France.

The growth in votes for the FN is above all a result of the discontent with the establishment parties. A survey by the European Commission found that 88 percent of French voters had no confidence in their political parties, and that 80 percent mistrusted the government.

Marine Le Pen, who has led the FN for three years, is careful to place social questions at the centre of her propaganda. The FN is expressly opposed to the euro and the European Union (EU), which many French people hold responsible for the social crisis and the high level of unemployment.

However, that does not mean that the FN has abandoned its fascist attitudes. Just this week, the 85-year old founder of the party, Jean-Marie Le Pen, who is the party's lead candidate in the southeast, lashed out against the "swamping" of France by immigrants, and declared that the problem could be solved in three months with the Ebola virus.

For a long time, the FN has achieved good election results in the decaying former industrial regions, plagued by high unemployment, and in the less industrialised south. In the first round of the local elections in March, the FN stood in first place in 17 towns with more than 10,000 inhabitants.

The reason is not a shift to the right in broad layers of the population, as the media often claim; the votes for the FN pale into insignificance compared to the more than 60 percent of voters who are predicted to abstain

(a French record). Its electoral successes are a result of the rightward shift by the entire political establishment, and especially its "left" flank.

While sections of the UMP are in favour of direct collaboration with the FN, it is strengthened by the governing ruling Socialist Party's xenophobic and anti-working class policies. In the coming months, the government of Manuel Valls wants to sharply reduce wage costs and company costs, and cut public spending by 50 billion euros.

Under these circumstances, the strengthening of the FN is something desired in ruling circles. The French ruling elite needs the far-right to intimidate the working class and suppress the opposition to its austerity measures and war policies. Their collaboration with the fascists of Svoboda and the Right Sector in Kiev to install a right-wing, pro-EU regime in power in Ukraine is a warning in this regard.

Should the FN actually finish in first place on Sunday, the establishment parties will move even further to the right. The daily *Le Monde* wrote: "Such a result would certainly completely undermine the two main parties and could favour a political restructuring around an extremely dynamic National Front."

There are already strong trends in the conservative UMP to link up with the FN. The *Nouvel Observateur* noted, that "in view of the parliamentary elections in 2017, many members of parliament, especially in the South, feel threatened by a candidate of the Front, and are pushing their leaders to reach an agreement with Marine Le Pen's supporters. The idea is, to overcome what hurdles still exist between the UMP and the party of the extreme right."

Marine Le Pen feels strengthened by the rightward turn of the establishment parties. She is already boasting that "political life in France would be defined completely anew" if her party were successful in the European elections. She hopes that President François

Hollande could be forced to dissolve parliament and order new elections before the scheduled 2017 poll.

The FN has been able to extend its influence thanks primarily to the reactionary politics of the pseudo-lefts and petty bourgeois groups, who play an especially important role in French political life. They form a kind of protective shield around the government of Hollande and Valls, and around the Socialist Party, with which they are intimately connected through the unions, electoral alliances and numerous other disreputable channels.

The Front de Gauche (Left Front) of Jean-Luc-Mélenchon, Lutte Ouvrière (Workers Fight) and the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (NPA, New Anticapitalist Party) are participating in the European elections with their own slate of candidates. They are predicted to win around 10 percent of the vote. In their election manifesto there is much criticism of the austerity policies of the Valls government and the European Union. This criticism, however, primarily serves a preventive purpose: it is meant to deflect the widespread discontent and prevent an outbreak of the class struggle that would be directed against the Socialist Party.

The NPA cannot seriously oppose the government, since it supports the most reactionary aspects of the Socialist Party's foreign policy: the wars in Libya, Syria and the fascist-led putsch in Ukraine, which they glorify as a democratic revolution.

Twelve years ago, Mélenchon was even a minister in a Socialist Party government. The most important pillar of his Front de Gauche, the Communist Party, forms pacts with the Socialist Party in many places. Internationally, it works closely with Syriza's Alexis Tsipras, the top candidate of European Left, which explicitly defends the EU.

The goal of these organisations is not to mobilize the working class against the Socialist Party and the National Front. They speak for affluent sections of the middle class, who defend their privileges by attempting to suppress the class struggle.



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