

Neo-fascist National Front leads first round of French regional elections

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The neo-fascist Front National (FN) has made significant electoral gains in at least six of France's 13 regions in the first round of the regional elections on Sunday. The elections took place in a poisonous atmosphere of police repression and anti-Muslim hysteria, amid the state of emergency declared by the PS government after the November 13 terrorist attacks in Paris. The government stepped up security at polling stations, with police and soldiers patrolling in Paris and other major cities.

While abstention was about 50 percent, the neo-fascist National Front (FN) took 30 percent of the vote. This placed it ahead of the right-wing The Republicains (LR, 27 percent), and the ruling Socialist Party (PS), which suffered a devastating setback with 23 percent of vote.

The FN leads in six regions: Nord-Pas-de-Calais-Picardie, Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, Languedoc-Roussillon-Midi-Pyrénées, Normandy, Centre-Loire, Bourgogne-Franche-Comté and Alsace-Lorraine-Champagne-Ardenne. The LR-led coalition leads in four regions, and the PS in two.

FN leader Marine Le Pen received 43 percent in the northern Nord-Pas-de-Calais-Picardie region—which the PS and its ally, the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF) dominated for decades. They took only 18 percent, however. Hit by de-industrialization and the closure of the coal mines, the region has an unemployment rate of 12.5 percent, and one of France's highest poverty rates. One million of its 6 million inhabitants live in poverty.

These were the first regional elections since the PS introduced a reform cutting the number of regions from 22 to 13, which goes into effect next year. Since no party received an absolute majority in the first round in any region, a second round of voting will take place

between parties that obtained at least 10 percent of the vote.

The FN led in six regions and survived the first round to the run-offs in every region except Corsica, forcing PS and LR officials to decide what strategy to adopt to the FN next week.

PS First Secretary Jean-Christophe Cambadélis announced Sunday night the withdrawal of PS lists in the run-offs in Nord-Pas-de-Calais-Picardie and Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur. He said, "In regions where the FN poses a threat and the left does not lead the right, the PS will block with the democratic forces, particularly in Nord-Pas de Calais-Picardie and Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur ... For five years, PS officials will not hold office in these regions."

Polls suggest the FN could win an unprecedented two or even three regions: the southeastern Provence Alpes Côte d'Azur region around Marseille, the Nord Pas-de-Calais Picardie region around Lille, and the Burgundy-Franche-Comté region.

The FN's rise testifies to the reactionary role of the PS and the deep crisis of French capitalism. PS President François Hollande's deeply unpopular policies of austerity and war have discredited his party. In the absence of organized opposition to the PS from the left, and as the PS' political allies and the union bureaucracy suppress opposition in the working class, the FN is emerging as the key beneficiary of the police-state measures with which the PS reacted to the Paris attacks.

The PS has declared its intention to permanently scrap basic democratic rights. It imposed a three-month state of emergency, allowing the PS to ban and crack down on protests, and place anyone police claimed was a potential threat to public order under house arrest, without trial. The PS aims to amend the constitution to

grant the president the authority to exercise emergency powers indefinitely, effectively converting France into a police state.

The election results underscore that the PS' move to a fundamental break with democratic forms of rule has weakened arguments that voters should oppose the FN due to its anti-democratic heritage—its support for the Nazi-collaborationist Vichy regime, its denials of the Holocaust, and its support for French colonial rule in Algeria.

Rather, the PS' policies have integrated the FN into mainstream bourgeois politics. Seizing upon the Paris attacks and the European migrant crisis as millions flee imperialist wars in Syria and Africa, the FN campaigned for harsh law-and-order measures and anti-immigrant policies. Having won electoral victories in municipal and European elections last year, the FN aims to consolidate gains in the run-off Sunday, and strengthen Marine Le Pen's chances in the 2017 presidential elections.

After casting her vote in the FN-run Nord-Pas-de-Calais-Picardie city of Henin-Beaumont, Marine Le Pen said, "It's an important moment, important for the future of our regions, important also for the future of our country, important with regard to the catastrophic and dramatic events that have hit France."

Appealing to voters disillusioned with the PS and the LR, she added, "We aim to realize the national unity our country needs."

On the eve of the election, the PS and the bourgeois media made desperate but cynical appeals not to vote for the FN, claiming it threatened to undermine the Republic. On December 5, *Le Monde* carried an editorial titled "The National Front, an impostor."

Warning that readers should "take the far-right party seriously," it wrote: "Its ideology and its proposals are contrary to the values of the Republic, to the national interest, and to the image of France in the world. ... What will happen to fraternity, since the FN wants to reintroduce the death penalty, trampling the constitution? When its leader uses the November 13 terror attacks as a pretext to demand the immediate suspension of refugees' asylum procedures, trampling universal rights and a tradition that honors France?"

Similarly, Cambadélis appealed to the PS' political allies—forces such as the PCF and pseudo-left parties like the New Anti-capitalist Party—to block with the PS.

He declared, "The left is the last rampart of Republican France. The PS calls for a union of the left across France to defend the conquests of the left and block the rise of the FN."

The remarks of *Le Monde* and of Cambadélis are cynical and false. By proposing to give the president the power to rule France through a permanent state of emergency, the PS has already repudiated the democratic principles historically linked to the French Republic. These principles can now be defended only by the struggles of the only remaining constituency for democracy in capitalist society: the working class.

The PS and its allies are not blocking the emergence of police-state forms of rule advocated by the FN. They are the ones imposing unpopular policies of austerity and war and building the surveillance apparatus and the legal framework of a police state. They are doing everything in their power to create the conditions for the emergence of a police state in France led by a fascistic party.



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