

Efforts collapse to form “Republican front” to block neo-fascists in French regional elections

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In the wake of the record success of the neo-fascist National Front (FN) in the first round of France’s regional elections on Sunday, various efforts to form a common “Republican front” of all other parties to block the FN in the country’s 13 regions have collapsed. The traditional mechanisms by which the bourgeois political system prevented the coming to power of a neo-fascist party in France are short-circuiting.

Prior to Sunday’s vote, conservative ex-president Nicolas Sarkozy of The Republicans (LR) announced in the end that his party would not call for a “Republican front” vote for the ruling Socialist Party (PS) in regions where LR came third behind the PS and the FN, to unify the anti-National Front vote.

As three-way races emerge between the PS, LR and FN lists in 10 of France’s 13 regions after Sunday’s first round, divisions are sharpening inside the bourgeois parties over how to react.

On Monday, Socialist Party prime minister Manuel Valls called on his party’s voters to cast ballots for LR-led lists against the FN, but only in three regions where the FN stands to win. These are Nord-Pas de Calais, where the FN list is headed by party leader Marine Le Pen; Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur, where the FN is led by her niece, Marion Maréchal-Le Pen; and Alsace-Lorraine-Champagne-Ardenne. Valls was promptly repudiated by the leader of the PS list in this last region, Jean-Pierre Masseret, who plans to defy the national executive and continue running his candidates.

Calls for a “Republican front” are collapsing, in the broadest sense, due to the repudiation of democratic principles by the entire ruling elite, in line with escalating militarism, anti-refugee hysteria and austerity across Europe. The PS is already deeply discredited by its tens of billions of euros in social cuts.

Now, elections are proceeding virtually at gunpoint, under the state of emergency imposed after the Paris attacks, with the PS pledged to pass a constitutional amendment creating a permanent state of emergency. This would mean the creation of a police state in France.

Under these conditions, hypocritical appeals by PS politicians to voters to rally behind them to defend Republican principles—that is, the social gains and democratic rights associated with the traditions of the French Revolution of 1789—no longer have any purchase on masses of voters.

“The Republican front has no meaning because it has no content,” Green deputy Danielle Auroi confessed in an interview with *L’Alsace* in which she tried to distance her party from the austerity policies of its PS ally. “There is no point in promoting hopes in a Republican front if one is incapable of carrying out policies in favor of the popular classes.”

In fact, the ruling class is repudiating the political consensus that emerged in the French ruling class with the collapse of the fascist Vichy regime at the end of World War II. This consensus insisted not only on the need for limited social welfare policies, but on downplaying anti-Republican forms of bourgeois politics deeply rooted in the history of nineteenth and early twentieth century France.

Now, however, far-right petty-bourgeois nationalism, including in its monarchist coloration, is emerging again as a major factor in French political life. In a widely reported interview with the political magazine *Charles* in June, Marion Maréchal-Le Pen maintained a distance from Republicanism and indicated potential support for monarchic forms of rule.

She said, “It is a political regime, there are monarchies that are more democratic than certain

republics. I do not understand this obsession with the Republic. For me, the Republic does not take precedence over France.”

It is ever clearer that there is no constituency in the French ruling elite for democracy, and the defence of democratic right falls to the working class, mobilised in struggle against all the different factions of the political establishment.

Political and media circles are largely focusing on the next election cycle, the decisive presidential election of spring 2017, and the possibility that Marine Le Pen could win and take state power. With the FN currently at around 30 percent of the vote amid mass abstention, bitter competition is emerging between LR, the PS and their allies over who can best rally the remainder of voters against the FN in a second round of the presidential election against Le Pen.

Like the debate over a “Republican front,” however, these superficial calculations leave out the impact of the right-wing course the ruling class intends to pursue in the meantime. It is not clear that a 70 percent anti-FN majority will still exist among voters in one and a half years. In line with the other major European powers, French imperialism plans to escalate the war in Syria, police-state measures at home—aimed at Muslims in particular—and austerity.

It is well understood in the ruling elite that these policies will strengthen the FN’s hand. Therefore, as they adopt large parts of the FN’s political agenda, the major bourgeois parties and their petty bourgeois periphery are demoralised in the face of the FN’s rise.

The PS fears that, like the social-democratic Pasok party in Greece, the agenda of austerity to which it is totally committed may lead to its collapse and disintegration. Le Pen commented that the Socialist Party’s “withdrawal [in Nord-Pas de Calais and Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur] can be the beginning of the disappearance of the PS.”

As for LR, caught between the PS’s stampede to the right and the FN’s rise, it desperately seeks to maintain its traditional position as the leadership of opposition to the PS.

Justifying his refusal to call for a “Republican front” with the PS against Le Pen, Sarkozy explained, “I am the leader of the opposition. My role is to be engaged in a campaign where we explain to people that the only alternative is ourselves. I am trying to explain to them

that there is an alternative, that they do not have to turn to the worst elements, that Mrs. Le Pen has an economic policy that is contrary to what France needs.”

Above all, what predominates is the utter bankruptcy of the so-called “left” parties, whose decades-long policy of tying the working class to the PS has produced a disaster.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon of the PS-linked Left Front, who has been discreetly developing political ties within LR as well as his relations with FN circles, opposed calls for a “Republican front,” refusing to choose between LR and the FN.

He said, “Where there is no left-wing vote possible, I will certainly avoid endorsing anyone. The choice of each individual voter is no longer political, but moral and philosophical. Each person must ask if it is possible to violate one’s political conscience in the interests of supposedly superior motives. Rather the Right than the FN? But is there a difference? It is not our job to proclaim it.”

In reality, the PS and the forces in its pseudo-left periphery such as the Left Front are no more an alternative to the National Front than The Republicans. It is their reactionary policies and their suppression of opposition to austerity and war in the working class that has fueled the rise of the FN.



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