

New defeat for ruling Socialist Party in French regional elections

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14 December 2015

The Socialist Party (PS) suffered a new defeat in the final round of the regional elections Sunday, amid a broader turnout than the first round on December 6. The neo-fascist National Front (FN), which had hoped to win two or even three or more regions, failed to win any.

Voter abstention was 42 percent, compared to 50 percent in the first round. Voter participation was strongest in regions the FN stood to win, such as the Nord-Pas de Calais-Picardie and Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur. Significant numbers of voters turned out to vote against the FN, which made broad electoral gains in the first round, leading in six of France's 13 regions. The FN participated in yesterday's run-offs in every region.

According to initial estimates, the PS won five regions: Bretagne, Aquitaine-Limousin-Poitou-Charentes, Languedoc-Roussillon-Midi-Pyrénées, Bourgogne-Franche-Comté and Centre-Val de Loire. The right-wing The Republicans (LR) won seven: Ile-de-France, Nord-Pas-de-Calais-Picardie, Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, Alsace-Champagne-Ardenne-Lorraine, Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, Normandie and Pays de la Loire. A Corsican nationalist list won in Corsica.

Although the FN did not win any regions, it obtained significant successes in both the first and second round. It is now emerging as a central force in mainstream bourgeois politics, benefiting directly from the reactionary policies pursued by the PS government of President François Hollande. It is poised to make a strong showing in, or even potentially win, the presidential elections in the spring of 2017.

As votes were still being counted, *Lib é ration* commented, "With 10 percent of ballots left to count, the FN has already won more votes in the second round than Marine Le Pen did in the first round of the 2012

presidential elections. Le Pen's party has never won so many votes in an election."

After the PS suffered a devastating setback in the first round, the PS called on its voters to cast ballots for LR candidates in regions where the PS came in third, ostensibly to prevent the FN's rise and defend "Republican values."

In the northern Nord-Pas-de-Calais-Picardie region, the PS called for a vote for LR candidate Xavier Bertrand against FN leader Marine Le Pen, who received 43 percent of the vote in the first round. In the southern Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region, the PS endorsed LR candidate and right wing mayor of Nice Christian Estrosi against FN candidate Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, Marine Le Pen's niece.

Attempts by the PS and its satellites such as the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF) to form a "Republican Front" with LR, ostensibly to defend democracy and block the FN's rise, were a cynical fraud. These forces, and the entire ruling class, are working to legitimize the FN's political agenda through their constant promotion of war, anti-Muslim measures, austerity, and attacks on democratic rights.

On Friday, Prime Minister Manuel Valls again called for blocking the FN. He declared, "We are at a historic moment. There are two options: the far right, who promotes division and can produce a civil war, and the Republic and its values. The National Front is an anti-Semitic, racist party that does not like the Republic and is fooling the French people."

Valls comment is a cynical political evasion. Although FN officials undoubtedly defend a deeply anti-working class and anti-democratic heritage—the Nazi-collaborationist Vichy regime, Holocaust denial, and support for war—the working class also faces urgent dangers from mainstream bourgeois parties, above all

the PS. Valls' own government is repudiating basic democratic rights, vowing to introduce a permanent state of emergency that would transform France into a presidential dictatorship.

The regional elections came just a month after the November 13 terrorist attacks killed 130 people in Paris. Afterwards, the PS declared its intention to scrap basic democratic rights. It imposed a three-month state of emergency, allowing the PS to ban and crack down on protests, carry out arbitrary searches and seizures, and place anyone that police charge with being a potential threat to public order under house arrest, without trial. The PS aims to amend the constitution to allow the president to exercise these emergency powers indefinitely.

Attacks on fundamental democratic rights are accompanied by policies of draconian austerity and escalating war that the PS has pursued since coming into power in 2012, with the support of its pseudo-left allies such as the New Anti-Capitalist party (NPA) and the trade unions.

Absent organized opposition to the PS from the left, as the PS' pseudo-left allies and the trade unions suppress opposition in the working class and support police-state measures, the FN is emerging as the key beneficiary of the police-state measures advocated by the PS after the November 13 terrorist attack. It is also exploiting mass disillusionment with the PS and the LR.

FN leader Marine Le Pen pointed to the FN's ability to rout the PS, boasting that by tripling the number of its regional councilors, "The FN will be the leading opposition party in most regional councils."

Thanking voters, she said, "bravo, dear friends, you freed yourselves from indecent slogans, campaigns of calumny and slander decided in the gilded palaces of the Republic." Welcoming "the eradication of a particularly evil-doing local Socialist Party machine," she pointed to "the inexorable rise, election after election, of the nationalist tendency."

While hailing the second round as a victory, both the PS and LR stressed that they view the FN's rise as inevitable.

Valls said, "Tonight there should be no relief, triumphalism, or message of victory. The far-right danger is not gone, far from it. I do not forget the first-round results or the previous elections."

LR leader and former President Nicolas Sarkozy declared, "The mobilization in favor of our candidates in the second round should in no way make us forget the warning sent to all political officials, ourselves included, in the first round of the regional elections."

Former Prime Minister Alain Juppé expressed concern over growing disillusionment with official parties. He said, "We should now draw the lessons of this election, which shows the rising mistrust of many of our fellow citizens to political parties. Let us not launch an idle debate now, to know if we campaigned too much to the right or not enough, too much to the center or not enough."

Juppé's main concern is not the FN's rise, which is the product of the austerity policies, wars, and the stimulation of chauvinism by both the PS and LR, but growing social anger in the working class.

On their part, the pseudo-left reacted to the second round vote with cynical jargon, hailing the so-called "Republican Front" calls for unity of all anti-FN voters around the leading non-FN candidate for blocking the FN from winning in the second round. These parties all tacitly back the PS' anti-democratic and police state measures, however.

Left Front leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon declared, "Tonight, a catastrophe was narrowly averted. ... We must thank millions of people who cast ballots that were nevertheless in contradiction with their most profound beliefs," apparently referring to PS voters who voted for LR candidates to prevent FN victories.



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