

The French regional elections and the threat of dictatorship

Alex Lantier**17 December 2015**

The French regional elections of December 6 and December 13 marked a further step in the collapse of bourgeois democracy in Europe. Held under a state of emergency imposed by the ruling Socialist Party (PS) after the November 13 terror attacks in Paris, with heavily armed guards patrolling many poll stations, the elections saw a surge in support for the neo-fascist National Front (FN).

The PS is pledged to write a permanent state of emergency into the constitution next year and continue imposing broad social cuts in line with European Union (EU) austerity policies. Exploiting popular anger with anti-Muslim and anti-EU demagogic, the FN hopes to win the 2017 presidential elections and aims ultimately to emerge atop the police state being built by the PS.

The neo-fascists emerge vastly strengthened from the regional elections. The FN tripled its regional councilors to 358, finally winning office in every region of France, whereas it was previously unrepresented in 10 regions. It won a record 6.8 million votes (27 percent) at the national level—only 5 percent behind the PS.

An unstable three-party system has emerged between the PS, the conservative The Republicans (LR), and the FN.

Politicians and the media are trying to lull the population to sleep, presenting the elections as an FN defeat because the FN did not win any regional presidencies. In northern and southeastern France, where the FN's Marine Le Pen and Marion Maréchal-Le Pen stood, the PS withdrew its candidates and called for a LR vote. The two FN candidates ultimately took 42 and 45 percent, respectively, as a layer of voters cast a strategic vote that narrowly kept the FN candidates out of power.

Claiming that "a catastrophe was narrowly averted,"

Left Front leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon said, "We must thank millions of people who cast ballots that were nevertheless in contradiction with their most profound beliefs."

This is a political fraud. While concern within a layer of voters over attacks on democratic rights played a role in the vote's outcome, the perspective of backing the PS or LR against the FN is dangerous and false. The PS and pseudo-left forces such as the Left Front, which voted unanimously for the state of emergency in the National Assembly, are themselves working feverishly to set up a police state.

The PS, discredited by President François Hollande's austerity policies, is advancing a constitutional amendment granting the police open-ended powers to carry out arbitrary searches and seizures as well as the detention or house arrest of individuals. All that is required is that the police assert that an individual's behavior could pose a threat to public order in the future. The PS says it will allow police to target people based on "their behavior, friendships, statements or plans."

Freedom of opinion and expression are to be eliminated. The police and the massive electronic spying apparatus are to have arbitrary powers to decide whose statements, phone calls or Internet posts constitute a threat to public order, and lock up or seize the property of those deemed a threat.

As for the PS's decision to withdraw from regional elections and effectively ally with LR, it only underscores the collapse of France's bourgeois "left" and allows the FN to posture as France's leading opposition party.

LR, which is trying desperately to stay to the PS's right as the PS shifts toward the far right, is advancing even more draconian antidemocratic policies. It wants

to intern all of the tens of thousands of people on whom the intelligence services have “S” security files—allowing intelligence agencies to send anyone to an internment camp just by opening an “S” file on him or her.

A deep crisis of the capitalist regime has emerged from the post-2008 economic crisis and the drive to imperialist war in Syria and across the Middle East. Aware of explosive anger in the working class over social inequality, austerity and war that finds no expression in the political establishment, the financial aristocracy views all opposition with horror and rage. Bourgeois democracy is increasingly unable to adjudicate intractable class tensions.

In France, the banks and the military-intelligence complex are abandoning the pretense of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity and turning to the worship of Dictatorship, Austerity and War. It is this, and not the fate of Marine Le Pen’s 2015 bid to become regional president of northern France, that determines the prospects of the FN, or whatever parties emerge from it. The French bourgeoisie aims to hand over ever more power to neo-fascism.

Democratic rights can be defended only by mobilizing the working class in a politically independent struggle, based on a socialist and internationalist program. This is the lesson of the entire period since the 2002 French presidential election crisis, when the PS’s Lionel Jospin was eliminated in the first round and mass protests erupted against a runoff between the conservative Jacques Chirac and then-FN leader Jean-Marie Le Pen.

The International Committee of the Fourth International, which publishes the *World Socialist Web Site*, issued an open letter to Workers Struggle (LO), the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR), and the Workers Party (PT)—which together had won over three million votes—calling for a boycott of the runoff. The open letter explained that an active boycott, mobilizing the working class in struggle against austerity and war, would best prepare the working class to oppose the policies Chirac would pursue.

These three parties rejected the ICFI’s proposal and supported a vote for Chirac, ostensibly to stop the FN from taking power. The outcome of the last 13 years testifies to the political bankruptcy of these petty-bourgeois parties, which for decades dominated what

passed for “left” oppositional politics.

After handing over their three million votes to Chirac, they aligned themselves ever more openly with the reactionary policies that have driven the FN’s rise. They supported Islamophobic measures such as bans on the veil and the burqa, hailed imperialist wars in Libya and Syria as revolutions, tacitly backed mass deportations of Roma, and campaigned for the election of Hollande, despite his stated austerity agenda. They were wiped out in the first round of the regional elections.

A vast and powerful constituency remains in the working class for democratic rights. However, the working class can fight to defend democracy only on the basis of socialist opposition to these parties and their anti-Marxist policies.



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