

Fillon, Juppé win first round of French right's presidential primary

Alice Laurençon
21 November 2016

Yesterday, François Fillon and Alain Juppé obtained the most votes in the first round of the Les Républicains (LR) primary. They will run against each other in the second round of the primaries next Sunday, to become LR's president candidate in the April–May 2017 presidential elections.

Fillon's unexpected surge in the polls, after long being in third or fourth position in the LR primary, pushed former President Nicolas Sarkozy back into third position. He was eliminated with 20.6 percent of the vote. Fillon took 44.2 percent, beating Alain Juppé, who obtained 28.6 percent, by a wide margin.

Other candidates, including Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet, Bruno Le Maire, Jean-Frédéric Poisson and Jean-François Copé altogether received less than 8 percent of the votes.

Sarkozy acknowledged defeat from his campaign headquarters, as did Le Maire. Both called on voters to elect Fillon in the second round.

There was heavy voter participation in the primary, with around 4 million voters going to vote. This level of participation easily surpassed that of the Socialist Party (PS) government in 2011, when 2.6 million electors went to the ballots to select the current president, François Hollande, as PS candidate.

The PS is now deeply undermined by the vast unpopularity of Hollande's policies of austerity and war. The media presented LR primary as choosing the candidate who will most likely run against Marine Le Pen of the neo-fascist National Front (FN) in the second round of the presidential elections next year. These calculations doubtless played a significant role, as well, in the significant rise of voter turnout for the LR primaries.

Moreover, the LR primary took place under the shock impact of the surprise election of Donald Trump, just over a week before, as US president.

After trailing Juppé and Sarkozy during most of the

campaign, Fillon gradually won support in the month of October, with his approval rating jumping 10 points in 5 weeks, from 12 to 22 percent of the vote at the beginning of November. After Trump's victory, just over a week before the LR primary in France, Fillon surged ahead in the polls, moving past Juppé and Sarkozy and taking 30 percent of the vote—compared to 29 percent for the other two, according to an Ipsos poll.

During the last televised debate of the right-wing presidential candidates, on Thursday, Fillon was found “most convincing” according to two polls.

Fillon's rise came at the expense of Juppé, whom the polls systematically presented as the inevitable winner in October.

Juppé and Sarkozy are both candidates who have run discredited governments. Juppé is closely tied to the ultra-free-market policy he carried out as prime minister under President Jacques Chirac, the “Juppé plan” that provoked a vast wave of strikes in 1995, called on the basis of defending pensions and social security.

After Trump's election, Juppé rejected all claims that there is a “social contradiction” between the population and the elites, an expression which Sarkozy used as a rallying cry throughout the campaign.

In a remark that underscores his aristocratic contempt for the masses, Juppé denounced the idea that a social gulf exists between the working masses and the elites as “an idiotic statement.” He added, “We need elites, it is what pulls us upwards.”

Sarkozy, for his part, had praised Trump's election as validation of his own claims to speak for the “silent majority” and as a victory for a democracy and the principle of “listening to the people.” Trump is unpopular in France, and Sarkozy's open support for Trump doubtless played a role in his elimination in the first round.

Sarkozy explicitly centered his campaign around

stigmatizing Muslims as well as occasionally moving closer to Russian policy, and his campaign was visibly close to the FN.

With the FN virtually certain to progress on to the second round, given the unpopularity and the discrediting of the PS, LR voters in yesterday's primaries were no doubt considering which candidate might have the best chances to beat Marine Le Pen. As a candidate who is not as openly contemptuous of the voters as Juppé, and less aggressively linked to far-right and nationalistic forces than Sarkozy, Fillon apparently was able to profit from his lower media profile and from the difficulties facing his rivals.

However, Fillon's political program and those of all the LR candidates show that the ruling class is preparing to wage deep attacks on the working class.

Fillon's program has no fundamentally significant differences from that of Sarkozy. He wants to launch massive attacks against workers' social rights, including public sector job cuts, drastic tax cuts for corporations and the super-rich, and reinforcing the police's repressive powers.

The character of the policies proposed by Fillon and Juppé stand as a warning to the working class. After the wars, austerity policies, and police-state policies under Hollande, the ruling class is preparing a set of deep attacks against the working class.

Fillon and Juppé both support attacks on workers' social rights and police-state measures like the current state of emergency imposed by the PS.

Faced with deep opposition to austerity in the French population, the fact that the LR candidates are so openly advancing such deeply anti-working class programs will doubtless reinforce the FN and Le Pen.

The FN will attempt to extract the maximum political profit from all of these parties' promotion of reactionary policies to demagogically present its campaign as the only one to oppose traditional politicians and ruling elites.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact