

Far-right Front National surges in French presidential election polls

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Little more than nine weeks before the first round of the French presidential election on April 23, neo-fascist Front National (FN) candidate Marine Le Pen is consolidating her lead over her main rivals. According to recent surveys, she will easily qualify for the May 7 runoff, most likely facing either Emmanuel Macron of En Marche or right-wing The Republicans (LR) candidate François Fillon.

Just as Donald Trump emerged as a viable and ultimately victorious candidate in the United States despite broad popular hostility, Le Pen could also win the 2017 elections due to explosive social anger against her opponents, particularly the Socialist Party (PS) government. An Elabe poll for BFMTV on Wednesday found that on the first round, she would get 27 percent of the vote, well ahead of Fillon (20 percent) and Macron (17 percent).

Even after François Bayrou, the president of the right-wing Mouvement Démocrate (MoDem), announced Wednesday that he would not run for president and endorsed Macron, Le Pen still led in polls. According to an Ifop-Fiducial poll held after Bayrou's endorsement, Macron would receive 22 percent of the vote. The same poll found that he would win the second round, 61 percent to Le Pen's 39 percent—more than double her father Jean-Marie's score of 18 percent in the 2002 presidential elections, the only other time the FN advanced to the runoff.

Though Le Pen would currently lose the presidency, she is steadily increasing her score in polls on the runoff, having risen between 1.5 and 2 percent since the last poll. With 53 percent of voters still undecided, a last-minute shift in favor of Le Pen cannot be ruled out.

Amid broad anger at PS austerity policies, the FN is surging among manual workers: 44 percent intend to vote for Le Pen, compared to Left Front candidate Jean-

Luc Mélenchon (17 percent), Macron (15 percent), PS candidate Benoit Hamon (12 percent) and Fillon (7 percent). The New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA) and Workers Struggle (LO)—which received nearly 10 percent of the total vote in 2002—would get only 3 and 2 percent of manual workers' vote, respectively, according to the polls.

The FN's rise as a serious contender for power is part of an international collapse of the post-World War II, US-dominated world order. After Britain voted last year to exit the European Union (EU), Trump took office having dismissed the NATO alliance as “obsolete,” signaled sympathy for Russia and attacked the EU as a tool of Germany. The international framework of European capitalist politics is disintegrating.

If Le Pen has been granted media access and treated as a respectable candidate, this is due to deep divisions in the French financial aristocracy over how to now assert its interests. The Socialist Party and the campaign of Macron, the former PS economy minister, back NATO's war drive against Russia and EU austerity led by Berlin. They were hostile to Trump during the US presidential campaign.

The FN, however, speaks for a faction that feels threatened by the euro, German rearmament and German economic hegemony in the EU, and seeks to partially revive France's traditional alliance with Moscow against Berlin. Le Pen, whose nationalist foreign policy echoes that of Trump, hailed the latter's election as the beginning of a “new world.” She also praised Brexit and called for France to leave the EU and the euro, returning to a French national currency, the franc.

“The euro is a major obstacle to the development of our economy,” she said. She has pledged several shock

proposals, including organizing a European summit to renegotiate all EU treaties. She has repeatedly said she wants to devalue the currency to revitalize French industry, and that in the case of the failure of such talks, she would propose a referendum on France's exit from the euro currency.

Should it take power, the FN would lead a regime of war and deep social reaction that would vastly accelerate the political disintegration of bourgeois Europe. Besides trying to slash workers' purchasing power with a policy of competitive devaluation aimed above all at Germany, its stated policies include slashing attacks on basic social and democratic rights. It would rely on broad support for the FN in the police, which has been given virtually arbitrary powers by the PS's state of emergency, to try to crush popular opposition.

In line with far-right parties across Europe, the FN plans to stir up anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim hysteria to divide the working class and cultivate a militarist atmosphere. It plans to expel undocumented immigrants, limit immigration and impose harsh conditions for obtaining French nationality. Le Pen has vowed to end free education for foreign children, declaring: "If you come to our country, don't expect to be taken care of, treated, that your kids will be educated for free, that's ended, game over!"

There is deep opposition in the population, above all in the working class, to the FN's agenda. Opposition to Trump in France, at over 80 percent, gives an idea of the underlying unpopularity of the FN's far-right nationalist program.

A columnist in Britain's right-wing *Spectator* recently gave voice to the bourgeoisie's fears of opposition a FN regime could provoke in the working class, writing: "If she did become president, France would face a genuine crisis, the worst for half a century. There would certainly be strikes and violent demonstrations by those who would see themselves as defending the Republic against fascism. How she could form a viable government or win a majority in parliament is unclear."

The working class cannot ward off the threats posed by the FN by supporting Macron, the PS, or the PS's various satellites—the Left Front, the NPA or LO. All helped pave the way for the neo-fascists' emergence. They defended the PS as it tried to fashion a social base

for its austerity policies, wars and attacks on democratic rights, imposing a perpetually renewed state of emergency and inviting Le Pen to the Elysée presidential palace as a mark of respectability.

More fundamentally, they are discredited by the failure of the PS and the global capitalist order. Macron, who laid out his economic proposals in the financial daily *Les Echos* yesterday, called for drastic spending cuts of €60 billion [\$US63.5 billion], including €25 billion in public spending and cutting 125,000 public sector jobs. At the same time, he threatened Berlin with "frank and demanding" negotiations to obtain more favorable policies.

Reports suggest that inside the PS, where utter demoralization prevails, the idea of the inevitability of a Le Pen victory is gaining ground. In a February 16 article headlined, "Why the PS believes in a Marine Le Pen victory," *Le Point* cited top PS officials including PS National Secretary Jean-Christophe Cambadélis, who said: "The alignment of planets was never so favorable to Marine Le Pen."

It listed 10 reasons—including Brexit, Trump's election and the impact of potential new terrorist attacks in France—why Le Pen could win. Remarkably, one of the reasons given was that the neo-fascists and allied pro-FN intellectuals, like journalist Eric Zemmour and writer Michel Onfray, had "won the cultural battle" of ideas. This comment, from a leading liberal publication in France, amounts to a devastating self-indictment by the ruling class of its own historical bankruptcy.



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