French ruling elite rallies around Macron

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After the historic elimination of both of France's major parties, the Socialist Party (PS) and The Republicans (LR), in the first round of the presidential election, the bulk of the French ruling elite is trying to rally behind ex-banker Emmanuel Macron to stop the neo-fascist National Front (FN).

The PS and LR national committees both met yesterday to vote resolutions supporting Macron. The PS national committee voted it unanimously. In a decision underlining its own bankruptcy, this body postponed drawing any balance sheet of its historic defeat, in which the PS received 6.12 percent—the lowest score for a French social-democratic party since Gaston Defferre's 5.01 percent in 1969, shortly before the foundation of the current PS.

"The time for explanations has not come. Today, it is time for action," said PS First Secretary Jean-Christophe Cambadélis. "On May 7, I will vote, we will vote for Emmanuel Macron. I will do it without hesitation, without ambiguity, without conditions, as we did for Jacques Chirac faced with Jean-Marie Le Pen" in 2002.

The LR committee supported a statement without a vote, after tense discussions between those who wanted to call for a Macron vote and those who wanted to call to defeat Le Pen. The second line won out, and LR formally declared: "Abstention cannot be a choice faced with the FN. We call for a vote against Marine Le Pen so she loses in the second round of the presidential elections, and we will launch immediately thereafter our legislative campaign to present our alternate program, the only one capable of improving the situation in France."

Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Unsubmissive France (UF) and allied petty-bourgeois parties are entertaining a similar ambiguity, implying that they would understand if their voters backed Macron on the second round without explicitly endorsing him. UF leaders Clémentine Autain and Pierre Laurent of the Stalinist French Communist party (PCF) both called to "beat" Le Pen.

By supporting Macron ostensibly to block a neo-fascist dictatorship, or asking their voters to do it without them, the traditional parties of the French bourgeoisie and the post-1968 petty bourgeois student movement are committing a monstrous political fraud.

Macron is not a democratic alternative to Le Pen. He wants to extend France's state of emergency that suspends basic democratic rights, impose drastic austerity, and re-establish the draft, claiming that war is now "a possible outcome of politics." To impose such a program, he would intensify attacks on democratic rights and repression of mass protests carried out under current PS President François Hollande. These policies are not ultimately compatible with bourgeois democracy.

There is no question that the FN descends directly from the tradition of French fascism and is a mortal threat to the working class. However, it would also be a fatal error for workers to align themselves with the perspective of a Macron presidency, based on the ruling elite's proclamations that it is a "lesser evil" compared to Le Pen.

If the bulk of the ruling elite backs Macron, this does not signify that they intend to "block" a neo-fascist dictatorship, as they claim. Rather, they would prefer a dictatorship imposed by Macron, an ally of the European Union (EU) and the NATO military alliance, to one imposed by Le Pen, who hopes to by an ally of Trump and the Kremlin against Berlin.

The reluctance of Mélenchon or Nathalie Arthaud, the candidate of Lutte Ouvrière (LO-Workers Struggle), to immediately endorse Macron reflects their consciousness and fear of the opposition he will provoke among the workers. Their sympathies lie with the PS-backed candidate—they endorsed Hollande in 2012 and Chirac in 2002—but they fear exposing their left flank if they now endorse a banker and ex-PS minister after Hollande's disastrous presidency. They are thus maneuvering to try to preserve what remains of their "radical" reputation, the better to mislead and strangle workers' struggles against Macron and the PS.

The fact that the French electorate faces a choice between Macron and Le Pen, like the election of Trump as US president, testifies to a deep crisis of democracy,

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with revolutionary implications. The essential question posed by the disintegration of the PS is the building of a party that represents the working class. However, this requires a ruthless break with Mélenchon, Arthaud and similar forces and the struggle for genuine Trotskyism, the perspective advocated by the Socialist Equality Party in France.

Since the 2002 election crisis, the hostility of the different PS satellites to building a working class party is unmistakable. In 2002, Lutte Ouvrière, the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR, today the New Anti-capitalist Party) and the Workers Party (today the Democratic Independent Workers Party) received 3 million votes.

They rejected, however, the call of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) for an active boycott of the Le Pen-Chirac second round after the elimination of PS candidate Lionel Jospin. This would have laid the basis for a political movement of the working class against the wars and social attacks Chirac was preparing. They aligned themselves with the PS' campaign for a Chirac vote, demonstrating their hostility to millions protesting the Chirac-Le Pen second round in France, and internationally the millions protesting the looming war in Iraq.

Since then, the PS and the pseudo-left parties have backed attacks on Muslims, including laws against the veil and burqa, imperialist wars in the Middle East and Africa, and austerity in France under Hollande and in Greece under Syriza (the “Coalition of the Radical Left”). Hollande invited Le Pen to the Elysée and thus helped “de-demonize” the FN.

A broad radicalization of workers has taken place since 2002 in France. Two-thirds of the population says it feels that the class struggle is a daily reality of life. However, due to the political void on the left reflected by the rallying of LO and the LCR to Chirac's camp, the FN has been able to present itself as the main oppositional tendency with populist attacks on the PS and demagogic, law-and-order pledges to defend the French people.

Today, the ongoing political collapse of the PS and its allies is the product of the decades of betrayals and reactionary policies they have carried out against the workers.

Running Benoît Hamon, the PS was wiped out in virtually every locality across France. Hamon's 6.12 percent after Hollande's presidency is comparable to the collapse of Pasok in Greece after Prime Minister Giorgios Papandreou's drastic austerity policies. While they hope to unite in the short term behind Macron, PS leaders openly speak of a disintegration of their party. One said he feared the period after the legislative elections: “On June 18, there will be one PS legislative group in the National Assembly. But six months later, I don't know.”

Macron did best in western France, outside the main industrial centers, and in central urban areas where the upper-middle class is concentrated. He got over 30 percent in only three of France's 100 departments, Ille-et-Vilaine in Brittany, plus the wealthiest parts of the Paris area, downtown Paris and the Hauts-de-Seine.

Mélenchon did best in southern France. In traditional PS strongholds like Ariège and Seine Saint Denis, the working class northern suburbs of Paris, he received over 26 percent of the vote. He came first with 30 percent among youth aged 18 to 24 and the unemployed. Many youth decided to vote for Mélenchon after US strikes on Syria, to oppose the rising danger of war.

Among manual workers, however, Marine Le Pen came first with 37 percent to Mélenchon's 24 percent. The FN candidate took 43 percent of the vote among households earning less than €2,000 monthly, far ahead of Mélenchon (22 percent). Her best scores were in rural areas and in the old industrial areas of eastern and particularly northeastern France—former PS and Communist Party bastions, where these two parties oversaw massive de-industrialization in order to crush militant sections of the working class, particularly miners, steelworkers and auto workers.

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