May Day 2017

The perspective for the working class in the French presidential election

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This speech was delivered by Alex Lantier, founding member of the Parti de l'égalité socialiste (France) to the 2017 International May Day Online Rally, held on April 30.

On this May Day, the Parti de l'égalité socialiste calls for an active boycott of the run-off of the French presidential elections. The PES rejects the claim that workers must vote for the banker Emmanuel Macron to prevent a victory of the neo-fascist Marine Le Pen.

Already, high school and university students are mobilized across France to protest the dead end of a Macron-Le Pen second round. Tomorrow, workers will march. The overwhelming majority of the French people is angry at the choice of candidates.

The PES proposes to workers to boycott the election and mobilize in a political struggle against the second round and then the winner of the election, whichever reactionary candidate it is.

The political blackmail of the media, the Socialist Party (PS), and The Republicans (LR) to force the French people to vote Macron is based on lies.

Is Macron the defender of democracy against neo-fascist dictatorship? No, he was the minister in the current PS government that imposed the state of emergency.

Is Macron the defender of workers' social rights against the far right? His government sent hordes of police last year to attack youth and workers exercising their right to protest and strike against the PS' reactionary labor law.

He trampled these rights, guaranteed in the constitution in 1946 after the Vichy regime's repression of the working class under the Nazi Occupation, in order to impose a law aimed at smashing the Labor Code.

Is Macron an enlightened opponent of nationalism and war? He is the ally of Berlin, the European Union, and the Democratic Party in Washington, which threaten to attack countries around the world, from Syria to North Korea, or even Russia and China.

He plans a major increase in defense spending and wants to bring back the draft.

We know that Le Pen is a reactionary populist, appealing to racism and xenophobia, whose party descends from Vichy's collaboration with the Nazi Occupation. Her party is a mortal danger to the working class.

But the international drive to war, austerity, and dictatorship by the European Union and international capitalism is also a mortal danger to the workers.

Only the development of an international revolutionary movement of the working class can stop capitalism's drive to catastrophe.

The PES' strategy is based not on parliamentary calculations on the national arena, but on the international dynamics of the class struggle.

In the United States, millions of people have protested against Trump and the quarter century of imperialist wars since the dissolution of the USSR. Like the massive "no" of the Greek workers to the austerity policy of the EU and of Syriza in the 2015 referendum, this is a portent of the entry of masses of workers internationally into struggle

In France, the elimination of PS and LR candidates symbolizes the collapse of the two-party system that has governed France since the May-June 1968 general strike. This discredited political set-up, which produced the dead-end Le Pen and Macron run-off, offers

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nothing to working people.

A merciless confrontation is being prepared between the next president and the working class. To wage this struggle, workers and youth need a new revolutionary leadership, opposed to the PS and its allies, whose bankruptcy is obvious.

The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and its French section, the PES, are the Trotskyist leadership of the working class. The ICFI has struggled for decades for proletarian internationalism against Stalinism, social-democracy, and the petty-bourgeois parties that broke with Trotskyism in France.

This is the heritage on which the PES bases its opposition to the PS and its allies, the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF), the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA), and Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Unsubmissive France movement.

After World War II, the PCF promised, with the Gaullist right, to build a post-war capitalism that would expel the economic and financial aristocracy from control over the economy. After 1968, it brought its prestige to the PS, signing a Common Program with it, a year after the PS' foundation in 1971. Ultimately, it supported the Stalinist dissolution of the USSR and the restoration of capitalism in 1991. The failure of the PS, a capitalist party that imposed an iron dictatorship of the banks each time it was in power, is also that of French Stalinism.

The PES opposes, above all, the petty-bourgeois parties like the NPA, whose ancestors broke with Trotskyism. In 1971, the Organisation Communiste Internationaliste, the ICFI's French section at the time, broke with the ICFI and repudiated the principles of revolutionary Marxism to develop a Union of the Left with the PS. For decades, these parties worked to build and defend the PS instead of building a revolutionary party.

It is on this basis that the PES explains its Trotskyist opposition to the policies of Unsubmissive France leader, former OCI member, and former PS minister, Jean-Luc Mélenchon. Under pressure from the rest of the political establishment to vote for Macron, but fearing popular anger against both candidates, he has refused to advance any political line on the second round. He is completely abdicating his political responsibilities.

“I will go vote,” he declared. “But who I will vote for, I will not say. But you don't have to be a great genius to guess what I will do. So why am I not saying it? So that you can remain united.”

Mélenchon then said he hoped that Unsubmissive France could do well in the June legislative elections.

The PES' boycott campaign is the revolutionary alternative to the impotent parliamentary maneuvers proposed by Mélenchon. The PES explains that the bankruptcy of what passes for the French “left” is the product of a historic and international crisis of capitalism. The powerful class struggles that are being prepared will not be resolved inside the borders of France.

By launching a call for an active boycott of the second round and a mobilization of workers against the next president, the PES is calling on workers and youth in France to join the ICFI's struggle against war and for an international socialist revolution.

The PES is organizing in Paris its first public meeting since its foundation last year. It invites all workers and youth to attend the meeting and discuss the way forward for this struggle.

The PES asks its supporters in France to support its campaign, attend its meetings, study its political line and that of the ICFI, and to take the decision to join the PES.

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