

PES public meeting in Paris calls for active boycott of French elections

Our reporters
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On May 1, the *Parti de l'égalité socialiste* (PES), the French section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), held its first public meeting in Paris since its foundation last year to explain its call for an active boycott of the French presidential elections. The speakers were Alex Lantier, the national secretary of the PES, and Johannes Stern, a leading member of the *Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei* (SGP), the ICFI's German section.

Over 60 people attended, including a large delegation of Tamil immigrant workers and youth from Paris, as well as people who had heard of the meeting via the *World Socialist Web Site* or by meeting PES campaigners at the May Day rally in the capital. PES delegations and supporters came from Marseille, Amiens, Alsace, Brittany and Burgundy.

Lantier explained the political significance of an active boycott and why the PES rejects the claim that the banker Emmanuel Macron, supported by France's ruling Socialist Party (PS), should be supported as a "lesser evil" compared to neo-fascist candidate Marine Le Pen.

Macron is an ally of Washington and Berlin, supports their war drive against Syria, North Korea, and nuclear-armed Russia and has pledged to bring back the draft. Lantier noted that as a minister in the deeply unpopular PS government of President François Hollande, Macron supported France's dictatorial state of emergency and imposed tens of billions of euros in social cuts while helping introduce legislation to "reform" the Labor Code and undermine workers' rights. He played a key role in the PS' policy of converting France into an authoritarian regime.

With both candidates posing a mortal threat to the working class, Lantier explained, the only way forward is the revolutionary road. Unsubmissive France (UF)

candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon is setting a trap for the working class. UF voters oppose Macron, as do seven in 10 French voters. While declining to openly endorse Macron to avoid discrediting himself, Mélenchon offers only the perspective of an impotent blank vote or a Macron vote. He has now said that he would accept a position as Macron's prime minister, thus implicitly accepting Macron's war policy.

The PES meeting was the first public event held by a French section of the ICFI since 1971, when the ICFI split with the *Organisation communiste internationaliste* (OCI) of Pierre Lambert. The OCI had broken with Trotskyism, Lantier noted, based on a nationalist perspective of forming a Union of the Left alliance with the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF) and the newly-formed Socialist Party (PS). The OCI played a critical role in building the PS as the French capitalist class' main "left" party of government.

Forty-six years later, the PS is in a terminal crisis, discredited by President François Hollande's record of austerity, war and police-state rule, and by the PS' elimination in the first round of the presidential elections. Lantier stressed that the call for an active boycott and the preparation of revolutionary struggles in the working class required a thorough political reappraisal of left-wing politics in France and internationally, and a return to the ICFI's principled and irreconcilable struggle for Trotskyism. He appealed to those present at the meeting to support and join the PES.

Stern spoke to stress the ICFI's opposition to support for Macron, explaining that Macron, of all the presidential candidates, has been the most enthusiastic advocate of militarizing the European Union (EU) in collaboration with Berlin. The agenda of European and

particularly German re-militarization supported by Macron has involved elements of German academia rewriting the history of German imperialism in the 20th century and even downplaying the crimes of the Nazis and Hitler himself.

A lively discussion followed the reports, with several questions from the audience and contributions from PES members.

One audience member asked whether it was permissible to call for a boycott of the elections, given that a Le Pen victory is now a possibility. Reviewing the history of the FN's rise since its foundation in 1972, Lantier explained that a boycott was not only a correct policy, given the dangers posed by a Macron presidency, but it is the only policy that can halt the FN's rise. The FN gained support only because it could pose demagogically as the opposition party, as PS allies like the PCF and the OCI blocked opposition to the PS from the left.

Another audience member asked what an active boycott meant, and if it simply meant not voting. The speakers explained that the PES and the ICFI encourage the broadest protests and strikes against both candidates. It is necessary to expose their reactionary nature and that of their political allies, and to fight to prepare workers for revolutionary struggle against whichever candidate wins the May 7 run-off. They added that the meeting and the construction of the PES as the revolutionary vanguard of the working class were critical elements of the active boycott campaign.

Asked about the possibility of an imperialist Franco-German alliance against the United States, the speakers pointed to deep inter-imperialist conflicts inside NATO. They explained, however, that the task facing the working class was not to predict the specific, unstable diplomatic alignments that could provoke such a war, but to intervene to stop a war before it broke out. They cited Trotsky's remark that the task of the revolutionary vanguard is "to follow not the war map, but the map of the class struggle."

Leading PES member V. Gnana spoke on the ICFI's role in developing a cadre of Tamil workers and building the PES. The ICFI fought against the Great Betrayal of the LSSP, its capitulation to Pabloism and its entry into a bourgeois government in 1964 that ultimately split workers in Sri Lanka between Sinhala and Tamil. Now, he said, the ICFI has also waged a

struggle over many decades that allowed it to found a French section and give immigrant workers in France a party that represents them.

Many audience members stayed after the meeting ended to discuss the political situation, Marxism, and the Trotskyist movement. The PES sold many copies of its founding statement and its statement on the 2017 elections. There was a significant collection, and several audience members decided to remain in political contact with the PES or to apply to join the party.



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