

Why Emmanuel Macron is no lesser evil compared to Marine Le Pen

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These remarks were delivered by Johannes Stern, a leading member of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei, the German section of the ICFI, at the first public meeting of the Parti de l'égalité socialiste on May Day in Paris.

As today's international speaker I first of all want to extend the warmest international greetings to you from the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP), the German section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and from the entire IC. I am proud to participate and speak at this first public meeting of the Parti de l'égalité socialiste (PES) in Paris, at such a critical political juncture.

The PES is clearly the only party intervening in the elections with a revolutionary perspective for the working class. As comrade Alex Lantier has explained, our call for an active boycott is made, not from the standpoint of parliamentary calculations, but from the dynamic of the class struggle.

It is clear that a bitter confrontation is being prepared between the next French government and the working class. Workers and youth understand that they face two right-wing candidates, the neo-fascist Marine Le Pen and the banker Emmanuel Macron, who are deeply hostile to their interests. According to polls, 69 percent of the electorate are dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied, with the choice of candidates in the second round.

I mainly want to elaborate on one point: why are we not joining the entire bourgeois, liberal and pseudo-left camp, which seeks to portray Macron as the lesser evil compared to Le Pen, and urging workers and youth to vote for the former? Our answer is clear: very simply, Macron is not the lesser evil. He is the candidate of austerity and war! Like Le Pen, he poses a mortal danger to the working class.

On the question of austerity, I want to quote from a recent article in the *New York Times*. It is titled "How Macron would fix the French economy" and sums up what the international financial elite expects from their candidate.

"Clearly the case for change has grown more urgent ... Over the last decade state spending has grown even more, to 57 percent of gross domestic product, up from 51 percent. That's higher than any other nation in the world, and 18 percentage points higher than the average for developed nations. It's tough to say how much state spending is too much, but France has clearly fallen out of balance, and Mr. Macron is right that the trend is 'no longer sustainable.' The public payroll is similarly bloated, and Mr. Macron aims to rebalance the economy by cutting 120,000 public sector jobs, streamlining the pension system and dropping state spending back to 52 percent of GDP."

On the issue of war, let's listen to Mr. Macron himself. In a public

meeting six weeks ago in Paris, he said: "We have entered an epoch in international relations where war is again a possible outcome of politics." At the same meeting he pledged to bring back the draft and demanded that France maintain independent capacities "to conceive, decide upon, and execute" military action.

These are precisely the reasons why the entire international ruling establishment is backing Macron. Since he is an advocate for the EU and European militarism, Berlin, in particular, sees him as an ally in its megalomaniac project to militarize and dominate the EU in order to become a world power.

"We will only have influence if we jointly, Germany and France in particular, make Europe a genuine actor in the world," stated German President and former Social Democrat Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, just days before the first round of the election, in an interview with *Sud Ouest*.

Given "the United States' new orientation, a united Europe becomes even more important," Steinmeier continued, referring to the aggressive "America First" policies of Donald Trump. If the unification of Europe fails, "as nationalist and populist parties want in France, we will not be players but the pawns of other powers," he warned.

In other words, while Germany prepares for conflict with the other major powers—including the US—its opposition to Le Pen is based purely on geo-strategic calculations. It has nothing whatsoever to do with concerns over Le Pen's extreme right-wing and xenophobic positions, or the fascist origins of the National Front.

In fact, as German and European militarism rearm, the ruling elites are increasingly rehabilitating and implementing extreme right-wing and fascistic policies themselves. Alex already referred to Le Pen's invitation to the Elysée Palace, the imposition of a state of emergency by the PS government, and its plan to inscribe a law revoking citizenship into the constitution.

The entire capitalist European Union is not a means to unify Europe and bring about social justice and peace, but a breeding ground for nationalism, xenophobia, social counterrevolution, law-and-order policies and war. The austerity measures dictated by Brussels and Berlin have destroyed entire countries—like Greece—and thrown millions into poverty. The brutal anti-refugee policies of Fortress Europe have turned the Mediterranean into a mass grave, where more than 25,000 people have drowned in recent years. The detention centers and camps for refugees all over Europe recall the pictures of the concentration camps set up by the Nazis before World War II.

Like in France, the rise of far right and fascist forces, such as Pegida and the AfD in Germany, is an expression of a shift of the entire ruling establishment far to the right. In Germany, this is perhaps most

sharply expressed in an attempt to rewrite history, and even to downplay the crimes of the Nazis and rehabilitate Hitler.

Here is a recent quote by a German professor: “I’ve compared Hitler to Stalin. Stalin was a psychopath, Hitler was not. Stalin enjoyed violence, Hitler did not. Hitler knew what he was doing. He was a pencil pusher who did not want to know about the bloody consequences of his deeds.”

Already in 2014, this same person told Germany’s most widely read weekly magazine, *Der Spiegel*: “Hitler was not a psychopath, he was not vicious. He did not want to talk about the extermination of Jews at his table.”

These monstrous statements about the Nazi leader and greatest mass murderer in history do not come from a man who is primarily active in right-wing extremist or neo-fascist circles. The author in both cases is Jörg Baberowski, who holds the chair of Eastern European history at Humboldt University in Berlin. He has close links to the German military and the German government, and is even invited to speak and defended as a great intellectual by leading politicians of the Left Party.

Currently, the social-democratic president of Humboldt University, Sabine Kunst, is seeking to suppress any criticism of Baberowski’s statements by the IYSSE on campus—with the support of the SPD-Green-Left Party coalition government in Berlin. The IYSSE is the youth and student movement of the ICFI and the SGP, and has been waging a powerful campaign against the very threatening developments at Humboldt University, winning the support of students, not only at Humboldt, but at universities throughout Germany and among workers and youth all over the country.

The IYSSE and the SGP have explained that the revision of history in Germany is directly linked to the return of German militarism. We have explained that the German bourgeoisie needs a new historical narrative to overcome the broad hostility to militarism and war. They have to erase from memory the crimes of German militarism in two world wars, in order to prepare for new crimes and wars.

Three years after then German president Joachim Gauck and the German government proclaimed the “end of military restraint” at the 2014 Munich Security Conference, the far-reaching implications of this foreign policy shift are becoming clear. At the end of last year, the German government announced that the defence budget was to be almost doubled and the Bundeswehr massively rearmed. The Defence Ministry plans a substantial build-up of the army, navy and air force. The media is discussing the reintroduction of conscription and Germany acquiring its own nuclear arsenal.

In the meantime, media pundits and foreign policy advisors are making statements of which the Nazis would have been proud. A major foreign policy publication titled “Germany’s new foreign policy,” which includes contributions by German President Steinmeier, Finance Minister Schäuble, Defence Minister von der Leyen, along with leading politicians of the Greens and the Left Party, complains that in Germany, the “neurotic striving to remain morally clean” permeates almost every domestic and foreign policy debate.

“Whoever goes to war, usually has to be responsible for the death of humans, including the deaths of nonparticipants and innocents,” the publication declares. Particularly in “times of new strategic uncertainty,” it is necessary “to elevate the military, not only because societies demand such harsh trials, but rather because it is ultimately the most difficult, the most demanding and, undoubtedly, the crowning discipline of foreign policy.”

The conclusion of the publication can only be read as a threat: In the years to come Germany must “undertake much more politically and

militarily” and will face “foreign and security policy issues” that “the country could not possibly imagine in its worst nightmares.”

With this, I want to return to my opening remarks. I have referred to these developments in order to underscore that there is no “lesser evil” candidate for the working class in the second round. The policies of Macron are the same reactionary EU policies of war and militarism that are most aggressively being spelled out in Berlin.

As before the First and Second World Wars, all the major capitalist states are preparing for war. Just three days ago, Donald Trump stated: “There is a chance that we could end up having a major, major conflict with North Korea. Absolutely.” The semi-fascistic billionaire-turned-president of the United States doesn’t seem to be bothered by the fact that a “major conflict with North Korea” would mean “nuclear war,” possibly also with Russia and China, threatening the very existence of mankind.

“As the ruling elites prepare for war, the working class must be mobilized to prevent it,” comrade David North stressed in his contribution to the International May Day online rally held by the ICFI yesterday. He continued:

“The essential foundation for the struggle against war is an understanding of its causes. As Lenin explained in 1917, war is the product of the development of world capitalism ‘and of its billions of threads and connections.’ It cannot be stopped, he said, ‘without overthrowing the power of capital and transferring state power to another class, the proletariat.’

“Therefore, the fight against war poses, in the sharpest form, the fundamental political problem of this historical epoch: the resolution of the crisis of revolutionary leadership. Never has the contradiction between the very advanced state of the crisis of capitalism and the subjective consciousness of the working class been so great. But it is this very contradiction that provides the impulse for an immense and rapid development in political consciousness.”

As Trotsky explained in 1938, when the Fourth International, as the World Party of Socialist Revolution, was founded here in Paris, the decisive task was to resolve the crisis of political leadership in the working class. This is the significance of the founding of the PES last August, and its call for an active boycott in the run-off of the presidential elections. I urge all of you to study the founding document of the PES and its election program, and help build the only organization in France that represents the continuity of Trotskyism and advances a revolutionary program for the working class.



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