

Ahead of May 7 runoff, French right-wing Les Républicains on verge of split

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Ahead of the May 7 presidential runoff between the ex-banker Emmanuel Macron and National Front (FN) leader Marine Le Pen, France's right-wing Les Républicains (LR) face a deep split that threatens to blow the Gaullist movement apart. France's post-1968 two-party system, in which power alternated between various wings of the Gaullist movement and the Socialist Party (PS), is rapidly collapsing.

LR's presidential campaign was severely damaged when its candidate, François Fillon, was caught up in a corruption scandal after proposing an alliance with Berlin and Moscow against Washington. After the elimination of Fillon and PS candidate Benoît Hamon in the first round, LR is bitterly divided between advocates of a Macron vote and sections of LR closer to the neo-fascist FN.

On Wednesday, LR campaign manager François Baroin said senators who called for a Le Pen vote in the second round or who openly joined Emmanuel Macron's On the March movement to run in the June legislative elections would be expelled. After the first round, Baroin said he would vote "personally" for Macron. However, he later told RTL radio: "All those who get close to Marine Le Pen will be expelled. ... All those who get close to Macron before the legislatives, same treatment."

LR officials also reacted sharply to right-winger Nicolas Dupont-Aignan's endorsement earlier this week of Le Pen. On Twitter, veteran politician Dominique Bussereau, a cabinet minister in a Fillon government, denounced Dupont-Aignan as a fascist, declaring, "So-called Gaullist but really a Pétainist [supporter of Nazi-collaborationist dictator Marshal Philippe Pétain], Dupont-Aignan must be beaten in the legislatives and in his municipality. Real collaborationist!"

These comments come as conflicts in LR and its periphery explode. After his elimination in the first round, Fillon called for a vote in favor of Macron against Le Pen, although he had campaigned appealing to far-right sentiment, including the anti-gay marriage Protest for Everyone movement.

Other LR officials endorsing Macron include former President Nicolas Sarkozy, former prime ministers Alain Juppé and Jean-Pierre Raffarin, and Xavier Bertrand. After the first round, Juppé declared, "Without hesitation, I choose on this Sunday night to support Emmanuel Macron in his fight against the far right, a far right that would lead France to disaster."

Bertrand told *Le Point* he was warning "political friends who refuse to call to vote against Le Pen: a presidential election is a choice of what society we want," adding that LR was facing "the danger of implosion."

While much of LR is rallying behind Macron, several LR member closer to Sarkozy are refusing to choose between Macron and Le Pen. They include Henri Guaino, Sarkozy's speech writer during his presidency and an advocate of making extreme right nationalist appeals to FN voters; LR Vice President Laurent Wauquiez; and leading members Christine Boutin, Eric Ciotti and Thierry Mariani. Guaino said, "Voting for Macron is voting for the system I oppose."

Wauquiez refused to endorse Macron and called on LR to focus on the June legislative elections: "I don't want the only response of my political formation to be to gather around Emmanuel Macron. I will be clear: I will not join a coalition around Macron, because we do not have the same convictions."

A layer of LR officials, including Éric Woerth and French Senate President Gérard Larcher, is warning the party runs the risk of a split if these conflicts continue.

Larcher said that LR's duties included "not blowing up the political movement of people who share our convictions ... and not to add to the bitter taste of defeat the delights of division which would lead us to implosion."

Such remarks underscore the historic crisis that is tearing the French political establishment apart, as it turns far to the right.

LR descends from those forces that claimed to represent the heritage of General Charles de Gaulle, the leader of most of the pro-capitalist forces in the French Resistance during World War II, who allied with the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCR) against the Nazi occupation. De Gaulle and the PCF suppressed revolutionary struggles that erupted in the working class after the collapse of France's Nazi-collaborationist régime. They allowed many of the leading collaborationists to escape prosecution and go on to found leading parties of post-war France, including the FN and the Socialist Party.

The objective basis for De Gaulle's patriotic appeals and the PCF's class-collaborationist policy was the massive financial aid Washington granted to Europe in order to avert social revolution and rebuild European capitalism after World War II. Relying on the political heritage of the wartime alliance with Stalinism, the Gaullists could base their rule on limited but tangible concessions and promises to the working class in the decades just after the war.

They promised to evict "economic and financial aristocracies" from control over the capitalist economy, to set up a social welfare state respecting democratic rights, and to ensure that Europe would not again return to the carnage of the two world wars.

These mechanisms have been irrevocably shattered after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the collapse of the Stalinist parties and the deep crisis of post-Soviet European capitalism. The social concessions that laid the basis of the PCF's collaboration with de Gaulle, and the military restraints on the European imperialist states imposed by the existence of the USSR, disappeared. Now, the European Union (EU) functions as a machine to impose austerity and war, and democratic rights have been suspended in France for two years under the PS' state of emergency.

Over the decades, LR's invocations of de Gaulle became empty rhetoric that did not in any way unify its

factions. They all turned far to the right, notably approving the strategy of Sarkozy and Guaino to appeal to FN voters during Sarkozy's 2007-12 term in office.

Macron does not represent a lesser evil than Le Pen, but a further stage in the counterrevolutionary offensive of European capitalism against the workers. A former minister in the Socialist Party government, he has pledged not only to maintain the PS' state of emergency and impose drastic austerity using its reactionary labor law, but to bring back the draft in order to wage what he foresees as an era of war.

The collapse of the two-party system and the shift to the right by the entire political establishment has confirmed the analysis of the *Parti de l'égalité socialiste* (PES). It is calling for an active boycott of the presidential election, to expose the reactionary policies of both Macron and Le Pen, promote opposition to them among workers and youth and fight to mobilize the working class in strikes and protests on a revolutionary and internationalist perspective against whichever right-wing candidate wins the presidency on Sunday.



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