

# On the eve of the French presidential election

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Tomorrow, tens of millions of people across France will vote in the presidential runoff election in the midst of an unprecedented political crisis and under a state of emergency that suspends democratic rights. The candidates of France's two discredited traditional parties of government, the Socialist Party (PS) and The Republicans (LR), have been eliminated. However, the choice voters face constitutes an unanswerable indictment of France's ruling elite.

On the one side there is Marine Le Pen of the neo-fascist National Front (FN), the descendant of France's Nazi-collaborationist regime in World War II. She has hailed Donald Trump's election on a nationalist "America First" program of war and protectionism, and called for France to abandon the European Union and the euro currency so as to do maximum economic damage to Germany, France's main trading partner. At home, she would use the Socialist Party's state of emergency and the mass electronic spying apparatus to set up a fascistic police dictatorship, ban immigration, carry out mass raids and end free schooling for non-French children.

Le Pen's opponent, the PS-backed banker and current favorite Emmanuel Macron, is not an alternative to the FN. An ally of Berlin and the Democratic Party in Washington, Macron supports NATO's war drive against Syria, North Korea and Russia, which threatens to provoke war between nuclear-armed powers, and is calling for a return of the military draft. At home, he intends to maintain the state of emergency and use it, together with the PS's hated labor law, to tear up contracts and social rights, including public health care and pensions, won by European workers over generations of struggle in the 20th century.

Whichever candidate wins, France will be ruled by a government that represents the interests of finance capital and is dedicated to a program of class war within the country and imperialist war beyond its

borders. With seven in ten voters angry at the choice of candidates, class conflict of revolutionary dimensions is being prepared in France and across Europe.

After a quarter-century of war and EU austerity following the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union, two-thirds of the French people say the class struggle is a daily reality of life. Among young people, who have known nothing but the social and economic collapse that has unfolded since the 2008 Wall Street crash, an unmistakably revolutionary mood is building.

In the EU's recent "Generation What" survey of hundreds of thousands of European youth, 61 percent of Frenchmen under 34 said they would be willing to participate in a "large-scale uprising" against the political system. Over 60 percent of youth gave the same answer in Britain, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Italy, Spain, Greece, Portugal, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania.

The *Parti de l'égalité socialiste* (PES), the French section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), is calling for an active boycott of Sunday's second-round ballot. This position is very different from a call for individual abstention.

The PES call for opposition among workers and youth to both candidates is grounded in fundamental political principles. The entire experience of the international class struggle, extending over more than a century, has demonstrated the politically fatal consequences of entering into electoral alliances with a bourgeois party. Time and again, the subordination of the working class to one reactionary party of finance capital in order to prevent the victory of a supposedly more reactionary bourgeois party has led to political disaster. It will be no different this time. There is a political logic to such politics. If Macron wins the election, the workers will be told that they must not fight for the defeat and overthrow of his government, lest the FN come to power.

There is no clever electoral maneuver that can solve the political crisis that confronts the working class. The call for a boycott is correct because it raises the political consciousness of the working class and prepares it for the struggles that lie ahead.

The key issue is to provide a Marxist and internationalist perspective and build the revolutionary leadership in the working class required for these struggles.

Many workers in France have drawn conclusions from the last time virtually the entire political establishment, including the so-called “far left” parties aligned with the PS, united behind a right-wing politician supposedly to block the FN—the 2002 runoff between Jean-Marie Le Pen and Jacques Chirac. The result has been an intensification of attacks on the working class, a further lurch to the right by the traditional ruling parties and a steady growth in the influence of the neo-fascists.

It is necessary to reject the entire reactionary framework of this election and the political system that produced it. The working class must advance its own independent political alternative, beginning with an active boycott of Sunday’s runoff.

The PES warns that to the extent that forces like Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s Unsubmissive France (UF) movement and the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) adapt themselves to the “lesser evil” argument and succeed in blocking revolutionary opposition to Macron from the left, they only strengthen the FN. The position of these pseudo-left forces in the election will only bolster the neo-fascists’ efforts to present themselves as the sole antiestablishment party, increasing their authority in the event that Macron is elected and provokes mass social opposition as a result of his anti-working class policies.

Mélenchon’s position is a cowardly abdication of political responsibility. He received 20 percent of the vote. Yet while he declines to explicitly support Macron, fearing that this would discredit him with his voters, he is doing everything he can to prevent a mobilization of the working class against Macron and Le Pen. After calling for UF to run in the June legislative elections, Mélenchon announced that he is willing to become Macron’s prime minister.

Such a statement, making clear that Mélenchon is willing to oversee domestic policy amid a mass military

buildup and an aggressive foreign policy led by Macron, shows that UF and its allies are a dead end for voters seeking peace and social equality.

As the old political setup around the PS and LR collapses, the only way forward for workers is a conscious political break with the PS and its periphery and a return to the revolutionary road. The complete dead end of the French political establishment is rooted in a mortal crisis of the world capitalist system, which is plunging into the abyss of war and dictatorship.

To mount a revolutionary counteroffensive in opposition to the PS, Macron and the FN, the working class needs its own party and political leadership. On this centenary of the October Revolution, the PES advances itself as the representative of the irreconcilable socialist and internationalist program of the Bolshevik Party of Lenin and Trotsky in 1917 and the heritage of Trotskyism defended by the ICFI. It appeals to workers and youth who agree with its analysis of the elections to support the PES, study its program and join the struggle to build it as the political vanguard of the working class in France.



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