Macron wins French presidency

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8 May 2017

Emmanuel Macron, the former Rothschild banker and economy minister of France's outgoing Socialist Party (PS) government, was elected president on Sunday. He received 65 percent of the vote against Marine Le Pen, the candidate of the neo-fascist National Front (FN).

Both candidates were deeply unpopular. Abstention in Sunday's second-round run-off election reached 26 percent, the highest in a French presidential election since 1969. Fully 12 percent of voters, a record 4.2 million people, cast blank or spoiled ballots to express their hostility to both candidates presented by the French political establishment. Thirty-four percent of voters aged 18 to 24, 32 percent of voters aged 25 to 34, 35 percent of the unemployed, and 32 percent of manual workers abstained.

Macron voters overwhelmingly selected their candidate not on the basis of support for his program of austerity, militarism and law-and-order policies, but in order to keep the FN out of power. One Ipsos poll found that 61 percent of the French people so mistrust Macron's agenda of social cuts and war that they do not want him to have a majority in the National Assembly after the upcoming legislative elections in June.

As for the FN, its broad unpopularity was underscored by the fact that the combined number of voters who abstained or cast a blank or spoiled ballot was larger than the number of people who voted for Le Pen.

Nonetheless, in a brief and perfunctory victory speech, Macron appealed to Le Pen's party and to her voters, ignoring the vast majority of the French electorate that had supported him or abstained. Macron addressed a "Republican salute" to Le Pen, promising to pay attention to the "anger, anxiety and doubts" that had driven millions of people to cast ballots for the neo-fascist candidate.

Macron, a supporter of the PS government's state of emergency, which suspends basic democratic rights, pledged to step up the French state's law-and-order policies. Making clear that he would build on the vast police and military deployments the PS has ordered since the imposition of the state of emergency two years ago, Macron promised to "ensure in an implacable and resolute manner your security, and the unity of the nation."

Macron struck a militaristic tone, declaring that he would focus on the "war on terror" and the defense of the European Union, as well as on "morally uplifting our public life."

Marine Le Pen spoke before an audience of FN officials. "The French people have chosen a new president of the Republic and voted for continuity," she said, adding that she had contacted Macron to "give him my best wishes that he will succeed in the face of the enormous challenges France is facing."

She referred to the support given by the PS and its political allies to Macron's campaign in order to present her far-right party as the only opposition to the incoming president, declaring that the FN and its allies would be "the leading force for opposition to the new president's program." She continued: "The forces that have supported Macron have discredited themselves and cannot claim to represent a force that could create an alternative government, or even a political opposition."

Le Pen pledged to initiate a "deep transformation" of the FN in order to renew its image and turn it into a broader party that could aspire to win over a majority of the electorate and ultimately take power. She thanked Nicolas Dupont-Aignan, the leader of the right-wing Rise Up France (DLF) party, for his endorsement, and predicted that more right-wing parties would rally to neo-fascism in the coming period.

Macron's election resolves nothing. It only creates the conditions for broader and more explosive political

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crises and class conflicts in the coming months. He is coming to power amid a historic collapse of the two-party system that has ruled France since the May-June 1968 general strike, consisting of the PS and the Gaullist party, now called The Republicans (LR).

PS candidate Benoît Hamon and LR candidate François Fillon were eliminated in the first round of the election, both parties having been discredited by their decades-long record of austerity and war. The open cultivation of law-and-order and anti-Muslim sentiment, first under right-wing President Nicolas Sarkozy and, in particular, under PS President François Hollande's state of emergency, accelerated the FN's emergence as a major force in the French political mainstream.

Hollande's repeated invitations of Marine Le Pen to the Elysée presidential palace during his presidency played the same role as Macron's appeal to the FN in the name of national unity last night: to show that the PS and Macron view the FN as legitimate political partners.

Like Hollande, Macron appears to be cultivating the FN as a political base for his deeply unpopular program. He has pledged to use the PS' anti-democratic labor law to tear up contracts and social spending by decree, escalate defense spending, and reestablish the draft in preparation for an era of major wars.

Macron's response to the election result underscores the correctness of the *Parti de l'égalité socialiste*'s (PES) call for an active boycott of the second round of the elections. The PES rejected the claim that Macron could be relied upon as a lesser evil who would defend social and democratic rights, block the FN's rising influence and present a genuine political alternative. Instead, the PES explained that the central task was to prepare the working class politically for the struggles that would erupt against the new president, whether that turned out to be Le Pen or Macron.

This revolutionary perspective contrasted sharply with the parliamentary ambitions and barely disguised support for Macron of various PS allies, such as Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Unsubmissive France (UF) movement and the New Anti-capitalist Party. While Mélenchon declined to openly call for a Macron vote, he made no secret of his support for Macron, going so far as to offer to serve as his prime minister, in which position he would take responsibility for Macron's aggressive foreign and military policy.

Mélenchon appealed last night for voters to give UF a strong delegation in the National Assembly in the June legislative elections, which would strengthen his bid to become Macron's prime minister.

With Macron running a right-wing campaign and both the PS and the Gaullists supporting Macron against Le Pen, the FN was able to win a record 11 million votes, posing demagogically as a populist alternative to Macron. Le Pen lost by a decisive margin of 30 percent. However, she doubled the vote that the FN received the only other time it competed in the second round of a presidential election. In 2002, her father, Jean-Marie Le Pen, won 17.79 percent of the vote against the Gaullist Jacques Chirac.

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