

French legislative elections expose Mélenchon's political bankruptcy

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The 51 percent abstention in the first round of the legislative elections and the rise of President Emmanuel Macron's party, The Republic On the March (LREM), have shredded Jean-Luc Mélenchon's claim to offer a strategy for struggle against the new president's agenda.

His entire strategy revolved around the attempt to oppose austerity and the European Union's military build-up in a purely parliamentary perspective, without a political mobilization of the working class in struggle, independently from the historical allies of the Socialist Party (PS). His call for a Sixth Republic did not signify a call for revolutionary struggle against the current Fifth Republic. He proposed that his voters put him first in the Elysée presidential palace and then, after he lost the presidential elections, the prime minister's residence at Matignon.

The voters' verdict is shattering for Mélenchon. His Unsubmissive France (UF) movement will not have the hoped-for majority to send him to Matignon, but an impotent minority within the 577 seats in the Assembly, that LREM will likely dominate amid the collapse of the PS. In a statement published on his blog after the first round of the legislative elections, he expressed satisfaction that "Unsubmissive France still has candidates in dozens of electoral districts."

This situation vindicates the position of the *Parti de l'égalité socialiste* (PES), the French section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI). The PES explained that workers' struggles could only proceed outside the officially-sanctioned channels, based on a revolutionary and internationalist socialist perspective. It was to give such an independent perspective that it called for an active boycott of the presidential election between Macron and neo-fascist candidate Marine Le Pen.

In his statement, Mélenchon does not admit that the hopes he stoked in a parliamentary opposition to Macron proved to be illusions. He tries to blame his failure on the masses while also promoting the political periphery of the PS, including himself, pushing the workers to struggle based on parties and trade unions closely tied to the ruling elite and that are already responsible for multiple defeats.

He tries first of all to hide the role he played with a tautology: if LFI's score is not high, it is because not many people decided to vote for it. He said, "The vast abstention shows, I insist, that there is no majority in this country to destroy the labor code and undermine public liberties nor, either, for ecological irresponsibility, for pandering to the wealthy, all the things that are

on the president's program. Nevertheless, our country did not believe that it was possible to do something else, and in a different way."

He says he is trying to "convince" the French people by asserting that LFI, "a totally new political movement presenting its candidates distinct from all others, without the usual political sausage-making, combinations, and deal-making, has put on the first row a whole series of totally new candidates. It has been rewarded by being confirmed in its eminent position."

Mélenchon does not ask the obvious question: why did the masses not believe in UF, and what was in this the role of the policies of Mélenchon himself? In fact, the overwhelming abstention of youth and workers is a harsh but unassailable verdict not only on Mélenchon, but the entire petty bourgeois political milieu that for decades passed itself off as the "far left" in France, prior to the presidency of François Hollande and the collapse of the PS.

Mélenchon obtained virtually 20 percent of the vote in the presidential elections by criticizing Trump's missile strikes on Syria and mass drownings of refugees in the Mediterranean. But these statements, that rapidly won him a broad vote particularly among youth and working class districts, rapidly gave way to Mélenchon's attempts to avoid a direct challenge to Macron.

Events have demonstrated the powerful, objective political basis that existed for the call of the PES for an active boycott and the mobilization of the workers against Macron. Two-thirds of LFI members, mostly freshly recruited from the Internet, voted against support for Macron in an online vote. In the presidential run-off, 4 million voters cast blank or spoiled ballots as a statement of opposition to both candidates, a sentiment that certainly influenced large sections of the majority of the population that abstained in the first round of the legislative elections.

Mélenchon's role was to block a struggle, by spreading as many illusions as possible in Macron without explicitly supporting him, all the while shifting rapidly to the right. He first refused to call for a boycott of the second round of the presidential election, despite the vote of LFI members. He cited as a pretext the fact that LFI is a movement, not a left-wing political party, and therefore cannot impose a political line on its pro-Macron minority.

When LFI launched its legislative campaign on May 13, Mélenchon offered himself up as Macron's prime minister so that "the seasoned hand of a wise man who knows where the happiness of the people is to be found," as Mélenchon modestly described

himself, could temper Macron's policies. He took as a model the coalition government in 1997-2002 of right-wing President Jacques Chirac and PS Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, which proved to be deeply unpopular.

Unsurprisingly, these policies produced a collapse in popular support for LFI. In early June, Mélenchon told *Le Parisien* he was meeting Macron's justice minister, François Bayrou, to discuss the "law on the moralization of public life" proposed by Macron. He also spoke of his fears of social unrest, warning that France is a "powder keg." His solution was to form a "new Popular Front" of parties, trade unions, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) against Macron.

That is, according to Mélenchon, UF is to serve as the leader in a political coalition of PS-linked parties like the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF), various union bureaucracies, and their NGO allies. This is in fact not a "totally new" movement, but an attempt to make workers accept in a new guise the old combinations and maneuvers by forces in the periphery of the PS.

Voter abstention and LREM's rise are so many indications that the masses, and particularly the youth and workers, no longer have any confidence in such forces. This is the product of over a quarter century since the Stalinist bureaucracy's dissolution of the Soviet Union, and of 35 years since the PS launched its "austerity turn" in 1982, during which these organizations failed to repulse ever greater attacks on the living standards of the working class.

After repeated defeats of struggles against plant closures or attacks on pensions and labor law protections, despite the support of broad masses of the population for workers' struggles against austerity, the credibility of the union bureaucracies and their political allies has collapsed. The discrediting after Hollande's presidency and the current collapse of the PS in the legislative elections only increases the masses' distrust. The explosive social anger among masses of workers in France and across Europe is a sign of coming revolutionary struggles.

Under these conditions, Mélenchon has nothing to offer and, as in the presidential election, can give no clear voting instructions for the legislative run-offs Sunday. He said, "In the second round, do not give and do not allow there to be given full powers to the president's party—neither to those who called for it directly because they are from LREM, nor to those who, having presented other party affiliations (PS, The Republicans ...) are preparing all of a sudden, the day after the election, to change camp."

Immediately after, however, he repeats the media's arguments in the second round of the presidential elections to justify a vote for Macron: "Make sure you never permit the election of a deputy from the National Front, because that is what hurts us the most. [...] The National Front only serves the following purposes: to divide the people and favor temporary alignments who lead you to elect people who then attack you very brutally."

Mélenchon's call—to defeat LREM, LR, and the PS in order to deny full powers to Macron while not electing any FN officials—is as bankrupt and impractical as the others he has proposed. It would require a massive vote for LFI candidates, which have been eliminated in all but a few dozen electoral districts. Mélenchon's goal, however, is not to articulate a winning electoral strategy, but to continue fraudulently presenting Macron as a democratic

alternative to the FN.

Macron's initial moves to implement his campaign promises have confirmed the warnings of the PES, which insisted that he was not a lesser evil than Le Pen. He will write the state of emergency into law, creating a permanent police state in France, and ram an enabling act through the Assembly allowing him to rewrite French labor law by decree. This is how he plans to arm himself to repress social opposition, as the PS did when it passed its reactionary labor law, and to finance a broad increase in defense spending to allow the return to the draft in the context of the militarization of the EU led by Berlin.

These reactionary policies have not even a semblance of democratic legitimacy: an overwhelming majority of the population is hostile to them. In the unprecedented confrontation that is emerging between the workers and Macron, the working class will not be able to limit itself to the old forms of social mobilization that have already lost the confidence of the workers. It needs its own revolutionary party in France and around the world, the PES and the ICFI.

The bankruptcy of Mélenchon is also that of the anti-Marxist populism laid out in his campaign book, *The Era of the People*. He declares there that the era of socialism and the working class is over, that one should not distinguish between a true left and the false one (i.e., the PS), and that his citizens' revolution is not the "old" international socialist revolution—the one led by Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolshevik Party. He bases himself entirely on the postmodernist theories that dominated the era when the PS was the hegemonic force in what presented itself as the French "left."

The historic discrediting and collapse of the PS this year, and the bankruptcy of Mélenchon's maneuvers to supposedly launch his "citizens' revolution," are so many signs that an explosive re-emergence of the working class as a revolutionary force and of Marxism is being prepared.



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