

# Record abstention overshadows Macron victory in French legislative election

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The record 57 percent abstention in the second round of the French legislative elections constitutes the initial verdict of the French people on the political program announced by Emmanuel Macron since his election as president on May 7. His anti-democratic policy of imposing a permanent state of emergency, dictating austerity by decree and militarizing the country elicits only hostility or indifference among a large majority of the population.

Macron has benefited from the absence of any real opposition. In the second round of the presidential election, Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Unsubmissive France (UF) and the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) made clear they considered him a democratic alternative to the neo-fascist National Front (FN). Facing the unity of the established parties around Macron's LREM (La République en Marche--Republic on the Move), those who turned out to vote gave Macron the majority he wanted. Though only 16 percent of registered voters supported his organization in the first round of the election, it will have an absolute majority of 361 out of 577 seats in the National Assembly.

According to initial estimates, The Republicans (LR) will win around 128 seats, Melenchon's UF (Unsubmissive France) will obtain 18, the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF) will win 10, and the FN will hold 8 seats. Forty-two of the 355 seats obtained by the LREM list will go to members of Francois Bayrou's MoDem (Democratic Movement), which reached an electoral agreement with the LREM.

The election signals the end of an era in French and European politics, with the collapse of Parti Socialiste (PS). This social democratic party, which had dominated what passed for the "left" in France since its foundation in 1971, shortly after the general strike of May-June 1968, has been decimated. It dropped from

331 seats obtained in the 2012 legislative elections to 46 seats today.

In a televised address immediately after the results were announced yesterday evening, PS First Secretary Jean-Christophe Cambadélis announced his resignation. The PS, which may have to sell its headquarters on Solférino Street in Paris, will organize an emergency meeting of its secretariat Tuesday morning.

The so-called "far left," including the NPA and Workers Struggle (LO), who together received 3 million votes in the 2002 presidential elections, obtained no seats whatsoever.

Macron's prime minister, Edouard Philippe, reacted to the results by declaring that he would use his parliamentary majority to press ahead with his agenda: "On this Sunday, you have given a clear majority to the president of the Republic and to the government. It will have one mission: to act for France. With their vote, the French people have, in their large majority, preferred hope to anger, and confidence to despair."

Marine Le Pen, who was elected in her district of the socially devastated coal basin of northern France, declared that her FN was the only opposition party in the Assembly, given that LREM was allied to large sections of the PS and LR. "The old parties have become the satellites of a movement that includes them now," she said. She called for proportional representation, spoke of the "problem of legitimacy" of the government, and issued a bellicose denunciation of immigrants.

The vote is yet another defeat for Mélenchon. In order to promote the bankrupt perspective of a parliamentary opposition to Macron, Mélenchon first pledged to beat Macron in the presidential election. Then, after his elimination in the first round, he promised to win the legislative election and become

prime minister. Unsurprisingly, under conditions where all electoral polls indicated that Mélenchon would win only a small minority of seats, this perspective led to defeat.

Mélenchon reacted demagogically, declaring that the French people now had at its disposal a “coherent, disciplined and aggressive” Unsubmissive France parliamentary group in the Assembly.

The collapse of the PS is the expression within France of the disintegration of the international political context in which it developed its policies since first coming to power in 1981 under François Mitterrand, beginning with the dissolution of the USSR by the Stalinist bureaucracy in 1991. EU austerity policies and NATO imperialist wars waged since 1991 have deeply discredited the political establishment and social anger is rising among workers across Europe.

Voters' anger erupted against the cynicism and bad faith of claims by the previous president, PS leader François Hollande, to be an “enemy” of finance and a “socialist.” He supported deep austerity with the European Union, waged imperialist wars in Libya, Syria and sub-Saharan Africa, and imposed a state of emergency in response to terror attacks by Islamist networks Paris and NATO were using in the war in Syria. The principal symbol of Hollande's unpopularity was his attempt to impose the reactionary PS labor law despite mass protests and the opposition of 70 percent of the population.

Yet this was only the development by Hollande of the basic orientation of the PS--the “austerity turn,” support for the EU, and imperialist wars in the former French colonial empire—which it developed starting the first time it held the presidency, under Mitterrand.

Yesterday, a new series of high-ranking PS officials lost their seats: Hollande's former Labor Minister Myriam El Khomri, Education Minister Najat Vallaud-Belkacem, intelligence specialist Jean-Jacques Urvoas, and “rebel” PS deputy Christian Paul.

The main question now facing workers and youth is how to struggle against the social counter-revolution being prepared by Macron and his absolute majority in the National Assembly. They are threatened with a permanent state of emergency eliminating basic democratic rights and a determined drive to rewrite French social law by a government aiming to enormously develop European military forces through

an alliance with Berlin.

Only a broad mobilization of workers in struggle outside of the usual political and trade union channels, internationally and across Europe on the basis of an independent, revolutionary and truly socialist perspective, can stop Macron's offensive. Attempts by figures such as Mélenchon to promote yet another symbolic trade union protest in the face of Macron's cuts amount to throwing dust in the eyes of the workers.

Mélenchon called the mass abstention a “citizens' general strike” and called for “social resistance.” He appealed for a large regroupment of political forces around him, declaring, “It is the most total resistance that is legitimate under these circumstances.” While it is already clear that the labor law of the PS, on the basis of which Macron is preparing his social attacks, is deeply unpopular, Mélenchon proposed to organize a referendum on Macron's social measures, apparently in a forlorn attempt to convince Macron to abandon them.

The *Parti de l'égalité socialiste* (PES) insists that the way forward is a ruthless break with Mélenchon, the NPA and all the forces that have for decades worked in the political orbit of the PS. They formed alliances with the PS and even worked to build the PS itself instead of building a revolutionary party in the working class. The collapse of the PS, after a series of defeats of struggles against austerity led by the trade union bureaucracies since the 2008 Wall Street crash, also points to their own political bankruptcy.

The collapse of the PS underscores the need for the working class to turn to revolutionary Marxism and Trotskyism, and the construction of the PES, to provide the political perspective and leadership for the coming struggles against the Macron government's policies.



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