

France's new pro-Macron legislature: The ruling class in office

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Since Emmanuel Macron's victory in the French presidential elections and the historic collapse of the Socialist Party (PS) in the presidential and legislative elections, the media is insisting that a great transition is taking place from the PS to Macron's Republic on the Move (REM). In this narrative, the "old left" around the PS is giving way to a new "Start-up Nation" governed by Macron.

"It is my absolute sadness. I am 66 years old and I have the feeling that everything I've done in my life is damaged, broken, everything I've believed in," lamented PS heavyweight and Lille Mayor Martine Aubry during the legislative campaign.

She was not speaking about the social and industrial devastation of the Lille region, for which the PS is largely responsible, but the fact that the election would benefit supposedly new politicians from REM and not the PS: "I don't know how to speak to the French people anymore. But look who you are dealing with! ... The little newbies around Macron who were just chosen on a lark or because they are friends, is that better than left-wing people who have been fighting for five years? It makes me sick!"

And last week, at the Vivatech conference in Paris, Macron insisted that during his presidency, France would take on new life, along the lines of a young tech company: "I want France to be a nation of start-ups, a nation which thinks and acts like a start-up."

This fantasy-narrative, on which the media based their promotion of REM and Macron—and which provoked legitimate distrust, doubts and hostility in the population—is misleading from top to bottom. The PS was a reactionary party that attacked the working class, and REM's legislative candidates, carefully selected by conservative politician Jean-Paul Delevoye, proved to be as a body an integral part of the old ruling

establishment.

A large number of the REM candidates came from parties that had carried out policies of austerity and war over the past several decades. Nearly half of them, 244 out of 525, had already held political positions at various levels, from municipal office to ministerial posts or seats at the National Assembly. Of the 281 who had not directly held office, many had participated in electoral campaigns or in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) through which they were in contact with the established parties.

The ties connecting the PS to REM, whose founder Macron was economy minister under the PS presidency of François Hollande, are myriad. Macron was supported from the beginning by top PS officials or former ministers, including Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, Lyon Mayor Gérard Collomb, former Paris Mayor Bertrand Delanoë, Jacques Attali, former prime ministers Manuel Valls and Bernard Cazeneuve, former presidential candidate Ségolène Royal, Hollande administration advisor Bernard Poignant and Hollande himself.

Macron's parliamentary personnel is largely composed of PS politicians or politicians from parties allied to the PS in numerous governments since 1981. A fifth of Macron's legislative candidates were PS members. A dozen came from the Radical Left Party, from ecological parties, or from the Republican and Citizens Movement (MRC) of Jean-Pierre Chevènement. One was the former general secretary of the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF), Robert Hue! In several districts, REM did not stand candidates against PS candidates whom it supported.

The REM list included 79 candidates who were members of the right-wing Democratic Movement (MoDem) of François Bayrou, the current justice

minister, though not all ran officially as MoDem members. A contingent of approximately 70 candidates came from the right-wing Union of Democrats and Independents (UDI), a composite organization led by Jean-Louis Borloo, who was a minister in several governments under President Nicolas Sarkozy.

Ten candidates came directly from Sarkozy's party, The Republicans (LR). A former candidate of the far-right Arise France (DLF) party, which allied with neo-fascist Marine Le Pen during the presidential campaign, was also on the REM legislative slate.

The elected REM legislators are even more socially removed from the mass of working people in France than the PS majority in the old legislature. They are drawn virtually exclusively from the most privileged forces and will run a government whose social base is limited to the layers closest to the financial aristocracy in the affluent middle class and the security forces.

The startling 57 percent abstention in Sunday's legislative election underscores again their isolation from the vast majority of the population, a fact that even the media outlets closest to REM are compelled to admit.

The daily *Libération* noted, "According to interior ministry data, more than half of the candidates nominated by REM are in management or higher-level intellectual professions ... three times their weight in France's working population." It added, "REM is also the party which has the most forces drawn from management in the private sector (18.4 percent), doctors (21 of 537 candidates), and university professors (17)."

Approximately one-third of Macron's candidates, or 156 people, ran their own businesses, a fact that provoked the following comment from *Le Monde*: "In general, the so-called 'civil society' represented in REM is made up of CEOs, doctors, lawyers, private-sector managers or advisers to political officials. The Republic that is on the march there is that of the higher social and professional categories, of dynamic managers, and important people in the provinces."

L'Obs for its part observed the large weight in REM of "business owners, CEOs, leaders of start-up firms, and small business leaders" and quoted *Médiapart*: "The Republic on the March is a ... world of people who are doing pretty well, or rather very well, just like the main electoral base of Emmanuel Macron."

The educational backgrounds of the REM candidates was equally revealing. According to *Le Monde*, around 40 percent of them came from the so-called *grandes écoles*, major schools where entrance is dependent on special examinations that provide leading personnel in state administration, industry, commerce and finance. These include the Paris Institute of Political Studies [or Sciences Po] (50 candidates), the National Administration School (ENA, 10) and the High Commercial School (HEC, 9).



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