

Le Pen's neo-fascist National Rally leads European election polls in France

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With less than a week to go before the European elections on Sunday, May 26, polls predict the extreme-right National Rally (RN) of Marine Le Pen will win the most seats of any party in France.

The Harris Interactive/Epoka poll published on Friday gave Le Pen's party 23.5 percent, one percent ahead of the joint list of President Emmanuel Macron's Republic on the Move (LREM) and the Democratic Movement (MoDem) of François Bayrou. Several other polls over the last week estimate a similar narrow lead.

These polls point to the danger posed to the working class by the strengthening of extreme right-wing forces across Europe and internationally. Far-right parties are expected to win up to 175 out of 751 seats in Sunday's elections, including the Italian Lega of Matteo Salvini, the Freedom Party of Austria, and Nigel Farage's Brexit Party.

In every case, they are exploiting the social crisis and anger produced by the austerity, militarist and police-state policies of so-called "center-left" or social-democratic governments over decades.

The Macron government that came to power in 2017—elected in a second-round contest with Le Pen due to the mass hostility to the extreme right in the French working class and youth—is itself the most right-wing government since the Nazi-collaborationist regime during World War II.

Shortly after his election, the "president of the rich" slashed the fortune tax on France's financial elite, privatized the national railway network, announced cuts to public education and healthcare, and tore up the Labor Code to facilitate mass layoffs of workers by corporations. The government reported in December that 69 mostly large corporations had used the new laws to announce plans for layoffs, including the supermarket chain Carrefour, which intends to destroy

up to 3,000 jobs in the next year.

These attacks have been combined with Macron's demands for a build-up of a European army to wage neo-colonial wars, including independently of and in opposition to the United States.

The government has responded to the eruption of "yellow vest" protests opposing social inequality and the government's policies with police-state measures—arresting more than 7,000 people, ramming through anti-protest laws allowing police to ban individuals from attending demonstrations, and assaulting protesters with rubber bullets, water cannon and percussion grenades.

Before deploying the military against the "yellow vests," Macron hailed last year the legacy of the fascist collaborator Philippe Pétain.

The RN's campaign in the European elections is based on Le Pen's claim that it is a "referendum" on Macron's hated government. Last week, Le Pen warned that if Macron gained a majority in the European parliament, he would take it as a green light to intensify the police violence. This position is utterly cynical, given that the neo-fascist Alliance police union and the police forces more broadly, which are attacking the "yellow vests," are a key base of support for Le Pen.

Macron's party is opposing the RN, on the other hand, not on the basis of its fascistic attacks on Muslims and immigrants, or its vicious anti-working-class program, which the Macron government shares, but by denouncing Le Pen as an agent of "foreign powers." Thus, it is managing to attack the neo-fascist Le Pen on a right-wing, nationalist basis.

This mirrors the campaign by the Democratic Party against President Donald Trump in the US, centered on claims that he is an agent of Russia, in order to channel

the working-class opposition to the Trump administration in a right-wing, nationalist direction, and articulate the demands of the US intelligence apparatus for more aggressive confrontation with Russia.

In an interview with *Le Monde* on May 16, Nathalie Loiseau, the lead candidate for the LREM-MoDem campaign in the European elections, declared, “Marine Le Pen and her friends will be the representatives of [Russian President Vladimir] Putin in the European parliament.”

Gilles Boyer, a LREM-MoDem candidate, told *L’Opinion* on May 14 that the National Rally was “in a certain sense, the party that plays the game of our adversaries, our economic adversaries. It is closer to Trump and Putin than the defense of French interests. In a certain sense, the foreign party in this election is the National Rally, which nonetheless calls itself nationalist.”

In France as internationally, the working class is entering into struggle and shifting to the left, not the right. The “yellow vest” protests of hundreds of thousands that have taken place every week for the past six months have been driven by opposition to rising social inequality and poverty and dominated by demands for an end to austerity and a redistribution of wealth from the rich to the working class.

They are part of an international upsurge in working-class struggle against more than four decades of social attacks during which the class struggle has been suppressed by the pro-corporate unions.

The fact that Le Pen’s party is politically benefiting under these conditions is the outcome of the rotten and right-wing character of the French pseudo-left parties, including Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s Unsubmissive France and the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA).

After initially denouncing the “yellow vest” protests as right wing, this milieu shifted to a strategy of smothering the movement. Explicitly opposing revolution, Mélenchon promoted the corporatized, anti-working-class trade union apparatuses, declaring on his blog in December that “we must find an institutional solution to events,” via empty motions of censure of the government in parliament. Despite having won 7 million votes in the 2017 presidential elections, Mélenchon called no mass protests against the vicious police repression Macron meted out to the “yellow vests.”

Mélenchon declared last month that he is ready to form a “popular federation” with the Socialist Party (PS), from which the Macron government emerged. Macron has merely intensified the anti-working-class policies of his PS predecessor François Hollande. The PS’s role over decades, in which Mélenchon personally participated as a Senator until 2008, has led to its collapse to just over 5 percent in the current European election polls.

Both the NPA and Mélenchon implicitly called for a vote for Macron in the 2017 elections on the fraudulent basis that the election of a right-wing bourgeois government could be used to oppose the growth of the far right. Their policy of promoting reflects the interests of the privileged middle class that is hostile to any movement of the working class.

The rise in Le Pen’s vote demonstrates the bankruptcy of this perspective. It confirms the correctness of the perspective advanced by the Socialist Equality Party alone in the second round of the 2017 French presidential elections. The SEP called for an active boycott by the working class, insisting that the only way forward in the fight against the far right is the building of an independent revolutionary movement of the working class against the entire capitalist political establishment and the profit system they defend.

In every country, the promotion of far-right and fascist forces by the state is driven by the unending growth of social inequality and the ruling class’ drive to impose its policies of austerity and war through dictatorship. The critical task confronting the working class is the building of the Socialist Equality Party as a revolutionary leadership to arm the growing struggles of the working class with a socialist perspective.



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