

# Le Pen's far-right National Rally wins European election vote in France

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The results of Sunday's European election vote in France point to an extraordinary degree of hostility toward and alienation from the entire capitalist political establishment among workers and young people.

However, such is the rottenness of the official "left" and pseudo-left of the Socialist Party and Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Unsubmissive France that the far-right National Rally (RN) of Marine Le Pen was able to secure a narrow victory. She did so by exploiting anger over conditions of social misery, posturing as an anti-establishment tribune of "*le peuple*" against the elites, and demagogically blaming immigrants for the social crisis caused by capitalism.

The party of President Emmanuel Macron, which for six months has responded to "yellow vest" protests with mass arrests, tear gas, rubber bullets and the deployment of the military, came in second with 22.41 percent of the vote, against the National Rally's 23.3 percent.

The largest portion of the electorate—48.7 percent, according to Ipsos polling—refused to vote for anyone at all. Among those earning less than 1,200 euros per month, the abstention rate was 58 percent. It was 52 percent for those earning between 1,200 and 2,000 euros. A significant majority of the youth, more than 60 percent of those under 34, did not vote.

Relatively large numbers of workers voted for Le Pen's party not out of support for its policies, but as a protest against the policies of the government and the "president of the rich," who printed tens of thousands of leaflets displaying only his own face, despite not being a candidate. The RN received the ballots of 26 percent of voters who said they did not subscribe to any party, by far the largest percentage of any candidate slate.

The two traditional capitalist parties that together

have ruled France since the Algerian War of Independence in the 1950s and early 1960s, the Socialist Party (PS) and the Republicans, were decimated, receiving a combined 14 percent.

The Gaullist Republicans fell to just over 8 percent. Almost one third of those who voted for Republican candidate Francois Fillon in the first round of the 2017 presidential election switched to Macron's slate, according to Ipsos.

The PS received 6 percent of the vote, its lowest result ever. It scraped across the five percent threshold for entering parliament. Its vote in the EU elections has fallen precipitously from 28.9 percent in 2004 to 16.5 percent in 2009 and 14 percent in 2014. According to Ipsos, it received the votes of just three percent of *employés* (administrative and service and hospitality workers) and eight percent of *ouvriers* (industrial and manufacturing workers).

The party is reviled as a tool of big business, having imposed pro-corporate policies that have torn apart the lives of workers and their families over decades. Macron, who emerged out of the PS and served as finance minister under his PS predecessor François Hollande, has continued and intensified all of Hollande's austerity policies, including the tearing up of the Labor Code to facilitate mass layoffs by corporations.

The collapse of the PS mirrors the repudiation by the working class of social-democratic and "center-left" capitalist parties internationally, including in Germany, the UK and in the recent federal elections in Australia.

The most direct beneficiaries of the decline of the PS were the Greens, who outperformed all pre-election polls to win 14 percent of the vote. This was overwhelmingly due to the youth vote, with 28 percent of those aged 25-34 and 25 percent of those 18-24

voting for the party. The Greens were the undeserving beneficiaries of a growing politicization of broad layers of youth, which has been expressed in the “Friday for Future” demonstrations and opposition to the refusal of bribed governments to take any measures to avert global warming.

The Greens will do nothing to address climate change because they support the source of global warming, the capitalist profit system and the subordination of society to the interests of giant corporations. It is a party of big business, which has supported wars and attacks on the working class when in government, most notably in Germany from 1998 to 2005 and Australia from 2012 to 2015.

The most marked collapse of any party’s vote was that for Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s Unsubmissive France. It won 6 percent of the vote, down from 19.58 percent—or seven million people—in 2017. While Melenchon’s presidential voters were slightly more likely than those of any other party to abstain from the EU elections, 64 percent of them simply voted for other candidates.

The past 18 months have provided a sharp exposure of Mélenchon’s policies. He has refused to offer anything to satisfy the demands of the “yellow vest” protesters for social equality. Instead, he has denounced any perspective oriented to unifying the working class in the struggle for socialism and insisted that there must be an “institutional solution” to the protests. He made this more explicit in April, calling for a “popular federation” coalition with the hated Socialist Party.

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Mélenchon’s nationalist calls for a movement of “the people” only strengthen the appeal of the RN’s populist demagogy. In the lead-up to the vote, Andréa Kotarac, one of Mélenchon’s leading members, announced that he was supporting the RN, declaring that it most consistently articulated his own long-held and publicly expressed nationalism and opposition to immigration. Le Pen publicly thanked Kotarac after the vote.

Mélenchon, like Labour leader Corbyn in the UK, Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece, is increasingly exposed for what he is: a faithful servant of the capitalist class committed to defending the profit system at all costs from any challenge by the working

class. His essential role is to disorient workers and youth and block those seeking a genuine socialist perspective from finding it.

The outcome is that the political descendants of the Nazi-collaborationist Vichy regime are able to capitalize on social distress, winning 29 percent of the votes of the unemployed, 40 percent of *ouvriers* and 27 percent of *employés*, significantly more than any other party. Le Pen beat Macron in every income bracket below 3,000 euros per month, and, as in 2014, carried rural and deindustrialized areas to the north and east of the country that have seen mass layoffs over the past three decades. In percentage terms, however, Le Pen’s vote declined slightly from 2014.

The Macron government has already made clear that its response to the election will be a further shift to the right. On Sunday night, Prime Minister Edouard Philippe sought to deny the responsibility of his own government for the victory of the RN while legitimizing the neo-fascist party. He declared that “it does not suffice to speak of anger” or “rejection” in the vote, but that the RN had become “one of the grand political forces” and “all the political representatives must hear this message of the French. ... We have received it loud and clear.”

This continues the government’s efforts to promote the extreme right, including Macron’s hailing of Nazi collaborator Marshal Philippe Pétain last November and his “Republican salute” to Le Pen immediately after his inauguration. Macron, along with the Socialist Party and the Greens, campaigned against the RN on the nationalist and militarist basis that its opposition to a European army would be an obstacle to aggressively asserting French imperialism’s interests internationally.

This underscores the fact that there is no progressive faction of the bourgeois political establishment. As the working class mounts an initial offensive against Macron with strikes and protests, including the “yellow vest” movement, the ruling class is turning toward dictatorship as it prepares for war and intensifies its attacks on workers and youth.



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