

Record abstention in French regional elections exposes political establishment

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Following the first round of Sunday's regional elections in France, the various slates had until Tuesday to announce new electoral alliances for the second round of voting this Sunday. The first round was marked by a record abstention rate of over 66 percent. The elections have revealed the widespread rejection by the working population of the criminal policy of "herd immunity" pursued throughout the pandemic, as well as the authoritarian and austerity policies of the entire political establishment.

An alliance has been announced between the Socialist Party, Communist Party, Radical Party of the Left and Europe Ecology-the Greens, in the regions of Bourgogne-Franche-Comté, Centre Val de Loire and Pays de la Loire. This did not prevent four separate lists remaining in the second round in Pays de la Loire: François de Rugy of Emmanuel Macron's Republic on the Move (*La République en marche*—LREM), with 11.97 percent of the vote, came in behind the far-right National Rally (*Rassemblement national*—RN) candidate, Hervé Juvin (12.53 percent). They are maintaining their list against the outgoing president Christelle Morançais of The Republicans (*Les Républicains*—LR), who won the first round on Sunday, with 34.29 percent of the vote.

Under French voting rules, parties that obtained at least 10 percent of the votes cast can stand in the second round, and possibly merge with lists with at least 5 percent of the votes.

In Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, the Ecologists' Fabienne Grébert (14.4 percent in the first round), Najat Vallaud-Belkacem of the Socialist Party (*Parti socialiste*—PS) (11.4 percent) and the French Communist Party's (*Parti communiste français*—PCF) Cécile Cukierman (5.5 percent) announced on Monday that they would put together a joint list to try to unseat the outgoing LR

president, Laurent Wauquiez, who received 48.8 percent.

With 41.39 percent of the vote on Sunday, the outgoing president of the Hauts de France region, Xavier Bertrand of LR, substantially outstripped his RN rival Sébastien Chenu (24.37 percent). Bertrand has ruled out any alliance with Macron's LREM, which receive only 9.13 percent of the vote and failed to qualify for the second round. Secretary of State for Pensions, Laurent Pietraszewski, who headed the LREM list, has now called for a vote for Xavier Bertrand.

In Île-de-France, which includes the capital of Paris, the lists of the Greens, PS and Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Unsubmissive France (*La France insoumise*—LFI) have merged. The Greens' Julien Bayou won the highest vote in the first round, with 12.95 percent, against 11.07 percent for the PS-backed candidate Audrey Pulvar, and 10.24 percent for Clémentine Autain of LFI. He will face the outgoing LR president Valérie Pécresse.

In the PACA region, the Ecologists' candidate Jean-Laurent Félizia has withdrawn his list for the second round, after initially refusing to do so on Sunday evening. He has announced that he is supporting LR president Renaud Muselier. Muselier is predicted to beat National Rally candidate Thierry Mariani.

In Brittany, Normandy, New Aquitaine, Occitanie, Corsica and the Grand Est, the PS, the Greens and their pseudo-left satellites such as LFI have not fused electoral lists.

These electoral manoeuvres, through which the established parties attempt to defend their own against the FN, offer nothing to the working class. They will have no legitimacy, because these parties are pursuing unpopular policies of austerity, against the opposition

of the population. They have sided with the policy of “herd immunity” pursued by Macron and the EU, which has led to 111,000 deaths in France since the beginning of the pandemic. The international and French financial aristocracy, meanwhile, has reaped trillions of euros.

The abstention in the first round of voting points to the widespread discrediting of the ruling elite, and caught the media and political establishment unaware. A powerful movement of opposition is brewing against all the political parties. Macron himself warned at his Council of Ministers meeting on Wednesday that the “record abstention constitutes a democratic alert to which we must respond.”

A survey conducted by Ipsos/Sopra Stéria for Television France showed that 87 percent of 18–24 year olds did not vote and 83 percent of 25–34 year olds did not vote. In the next age group, among 35–49 year olds, the abstention was 71 percent, with a similar abstention of 68 percent among 50–59 year olds.

The BMFTV news channel reported: “According to the Ipsos/Sopra Steria survey for France Television, 75 percent of employees and workers abstained, but so did 69 percent of the so-called upper category (71 percent of craftsmen and tradesmen, and 69 percent of executives). According to another Ifop-Fiducial survey for TF1 and LCI, the rate is similar among intermediate professions, with 73 percent abstaining.”

These surveys expose the rejection of the political establishment by workers and young people, and also sections of the middle class whose social position has been reduced and even ruined by the policies dictated by the financial aristocracy. Using police repression, Macron was able to suppress the “yellow vests” protest movement, but the social discontent that underlay it is taking root and intensifying.

While polls suggested that RN would be the victor of the elections, the first round showed the failure of the far right to present themselves as being independent of the political establishment. Marine Le Pen called the election “a civic disaster, which has largely distorted the electoral reality of the country, and gives a misleading vision of the political forces present.” She called on her voters to mobilise because they had not taken “five minutes” to go and vote.

The media has attempted to portray the recent threats of a military coup in France by far-right officers as

enjoying broad popular support. Marine Le Pen herself called on the officers to support her presidential campaign. Yet seven out of 10 Le Pen voters (71 percent) subsequently turned away from the polls.

Le Pen, like the rest of the political establishment, is complicit in the deadly health policy and social attacks pursued by the ruling class throughout the European Union. The RN has been able to demagogically exploit the anger provoked by the right-wing policies of Macron, the Socialist Party and former President Nicolas Sarkozy. But its growth is part of a broader shift to the right of the entire ruling class, which will keep fascistic, chauvinist policies at the centre of political life, regardless of Le Pen’s electoral results.

Isolated and hated, the ruling elite remains in power mainly because of the absence of a perspective and leadership in the working class to overthrow it. The regional elections underscore the bankruptcy of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, LFI and other pseudo-left forces, which represent no alternative to Macron. Three-quarters of Mélenchon’s electorate abstained from voting, according to an Ifop-Fiducial survey. Indeed, the trade union apparatuses linked to Mélenchon have been at the forefront of the implementation of Macron’s health policy.

This demonstrates the need for a struggle to build a socialist movement among workers across Europe and internationally, to unite the opposition in the working class in a conscious struggle to take political power in its own hands.



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