

Far-right candidate Marine Le Pen surges in French presidential polls

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Over the past week, neo-fascist French presidential candidate Marine Le Pen has been rising rapidly in the polls, while incumbent Emmanuel Macron has been falling rapidly. Le Pen's vote stands at around 21 percent, up 2 to 4 points depending on the polls, while Macron's fell by 4 points to 27 percent.

It is now clear that the election of a neo-fascist French president is a real possibility, although Unsubmissive France (LFI) candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon has also risen in the polls, from 11 to 15.5 percent. According to the latest Elabe poll, Le Pen would win 47.5 percent of the vote if placed against Macron in the second round. In previous polls, she was credited with 45 percent of the vote in a second round match-up against Macron.

The result of these polls has triggered worried speculation in ruling circles, starting with Macron himself. The head of state absurdly insisted that he bore no responsibility for the rise of the far right in France.

"I have never trivialised the National Front," Macron said at a campaign stop in Fouras, referring to the former name of Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally party. Asked afterwards about a possible neo-fascist election victory, he refused to comment on "something that does not exist."

Macron was contradicted by his own former prime minister, Edouard Philippe. "Of course, Marine Le Pen can win," Philippe told *Le Parisien*. He continued, "I fear a high abstention, which is never a sign of good democratic health."

Philippe added that the presidential campaign of far-right polemicist Eric Zemmour, who this week caused a scandal by calling for the "extermination of scum" in France, is helping Marine Le Pen. Philippe said, "I also note that the very aggressive nature of Eric Zemmour, the often outrageous nature of his remarks, seem to

soften her by comparison." However, he added, "If she won, things would, believe me, be seriously different for the country."

Business leaders have already made it clear that they believe Macron's candidacy is far weaker than it appears and that they also fear the consequences of a possible Le Pen victory.

Movement of French Enterprises (MEDEF) President Geoffroy Roux de Bézieux has already let it be known that the MEDEF could accept a Mélenchon presidency. The president of the employers' organisation endorsed Mélenchon, whom he said is "ready to govern." De Bézieux added, "Yes, our disagreements are deep. But even our opponents recognise it: the favourite of the left for the presidential election is ready to govern, with a solid and coherent program."

The financial aristocracy and the Paris stock market have closely followed the policies of LFI's sister party, Podemos, which is in power in Spain. Podemos has slashed social spending to increase the military budget, pursued a policy of mass infection during the COVID-19 pandemic, and armed neo-Nazi militias in Ukraine against Russia. The MEDEF is confident that a Mélenchon victory would maintain this right-wing course and therefore gives him a blank cheque.

The leadership of LFI, for its part, has signaled that despite its candidate's rise in the polls, it will limit itself to the role of supporter to a possible Macron victory. Mélenchon's assistant in the LFI leadership, Adrien Quatennens, stressed that in the event of a Macron-Le Pen second round, LFI would make a barely veiled call to vote for Macron. "We will take a stand," he said, to "say that not one vote should go to the far right."

Quatennens added that the LFI leadership would organise a "consultation" of LFI members and

supporters, hoping to determine how best to package a call to vote Macron. However, he said that LFI is concerned that it will not be able to influence its voters: “People will do what they want. And that’s why we are going to consult the base. To find out what they want to do. But let’s be clear: voting RN [National Rally, Le Pen’s party] will not be an option.”

Powerful reserves of opposition exist among workers and young people, directed against both Macron and Le Pen. But this opposition cannot find expression without breaking the political straitjacket imposed on it by reactionary pseudo-left parties like LFI.

Indeed, in the Macron-Le Pen run-off in the 2017 elections, two-thirds of LFI voters were hostile to both Macron and Le Pen. It was by appealing to this opposition that the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) of France launched the call for an active boycott of the second round in 2017, and for the building of a politically independent movement in the working class against the winning candidate, whoever that might be.

However, in 2017 Mélenchon as well as New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA) candidate Philippe Poutou both made clear, in language mirroring that of Quatennens in 2022, that they backed Macron. Even if their support for Macron was somewhat masked, it was nonetheless very real. The NPA and LFI played a key role in the first major eruption of social opposition to Macron: “Yellow vest” protests for social equality were violently repressed by Macron while the NPA, LFI and the union bureaucracies did nothing to mobilize workers in their support.

It is this working class opposition, not an aversion to neo-fascism, that underlies the MEDEF’s unease about Le Pen. The bourgeoisie accommodated itself to the installation of Philippe Pétain as a Nazi collaborationist dictator by the vote of the National Assembly on July 10, 1940 following the defeat of France by the Nazi Wehrmacht. It could accommodate a Le Pen president. But it fears the conclusions that millions of workers and youth would draw from the election of a president whose political heritage goes back to the collaboration with Nazism.

Indeed, the increasing danger of the installation of a neo-fascist government only underlines the warning issued by the SEP in 2017: The turn of the ruling elites towards fascist dictatorship cannot be opposed from within the framework of the institutions of the capitalist

state.

This requires mobilizing workers internationally in a struggle against capitalism and imperialist war, in opposition to all of the political forces that try to bind them to a bankrupt capitalist system.

Macron’s presidency has seen an international eruption of class struggle. The first major strikes in decades in the US in auto factories, schools and mines, and struggles like the “yellow vests” in France and the 2019-21 Algerian protests (called Revolution of Smiles or Hirak Movement) have launched a wave of strikes and protests that are now shaking every continent in the world. The LFI, the NPA, the CGT union apparatus and their counterparts internationally have gone in a diametrically opposed direction in response to the explosive entry of the masses into political struggle.

The evolution of the ruling elite, including its supposedly “left” fractions, has been to the right, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. LFI and its allies aligned themselves with neo-fascist-dominated anti-health pass protests that opposed a scientific fight against the transmission of the virus. Now they are all supporting the intervention in Ukraine by France and NATO, which are arming far-right Ukrainian nationalist militias against Russia.

The fight against imperialist war, official indifference to COVID-19, surging inflation that is impoverishing the workers and the danger of fascist dictatorship requires an irreconcilable break with the pseudo-left. This struggle, as in the 20th century, requires the international and revolutionary mobilization of workers and youth on a socialist perspective. The Trotskyist alternative to the pseudo-left is the Le Parti de l’égalité socialiste (Socialist Equality Party), the French section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).



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