

No to war! For a scientific struggle against COVID-19! Build the PES!

Parti de l'égalité socialiste statement on the 2022 French elections

Parti de l'égalité socialiste (France)
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As the 2022 French presidential election unfolds in two rounds, on Sunday April 10 and 24, the central issues posed to the working class are the international breakdown of the capitalist system, and the bankruptcy of the entire French political establishment.

The working class faces three great international crises which it must intervene politically to stop. The COVID-19 pandemic, into its third year, has cost nearly 20 million lives worldwide including nearly 2 million in Europe. Savage cuts to workers' living standards and purchasing power are underway to pay for bailouts of the banks and the financial aristocracy. And above all, the entire NATO alliance is arming the Ukrainian regime and its far-right nationalist militias against Russia, stoking a conflict that threatens to explode into a Third World War.

The election is hard to predict, with a quarter of voters undecided. Campaign debates have been curtailed based on calls for "national unity" on the war in Ukraine, and pollsters have forecast a replay of the 2017 second round between President Emmanuel Macron and neo-fascist candidate Marine Le Pen. With Macron's recent fall in the polls and the rise of Le Pen's National Rally (RN) and Jean-Luc Mélenchon of Unsubmissive France (LFI), however, the election is wide open. One can easily imagine scenarios in which any of these three candidates, including Le Pen, could win.

The central feature of this election is the bankruptcy of Mélenchon and other candidates built up by the mass media as "left," like Philippe Poutou of the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) and Nathalie Arthaud of Workers Struggle (LO). For decades after the 1968 French general strike, these forces oriented to the "Union of the Left" alliance of the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF) and the Socialist Party (PS), a party of finance capital founded in 1971 by former Nazi collaborator François Mitterrand. Now, as the PS and PCF disintegrate, they are deeply discredited.

Throughout the campaign, they trailed not only Macron, a former investment banker despised by workers as the "president of the rich," but also Le Pen. This was not because they advanced a left-wing program but failed to win support. On the most burning issues, like the COVID-19 pandemic and war, they largely criticized Macron from the right, letting the far right pose as Macron's leading opponent.

On a libertarian basis, they lined up behind far-right, anti-vaccine protests opposing a scientific struggle against COVID-19. They have now aligned themselves with NATO's policies targeting Russia, even as the danger of a catastrophic war mounts, and as sanctions against Russian fuel and grain drive up the price workers pay at the pump and in supermarkets.

This surreal political atmosphere, in which opposition to Macron finds no effective expression of a left-wing, socialist character, has let Le Pen demagogically posture as Macron's main challenger, positioning her for a bid for power.

The *Parti de l'égalité socialiste* (PES) does not endorse any candidate or

coalition of candidates in the elections. Macron's reactionary record must serve as a warning to the working class: none of them—Macron, Mélenchon or any of the others—represent genuine alternatives to a neo-fascist presidency.

Whatever their outcome, the French presidential elections will solve none of the urgent problems facing the working class. In the final analysis, this is because there is no national solution to these problems. The fight against the global pandemic and the financial aristocracy's drive to world war and fascistic forms of rule requires the international political mobilization of the working class on a revolutionary socialist perspective.

An international eruption of the class struggle is underway, driven by the intolerable social and economic conditions created by the pandemic, inflation and war. In the weeks prior to the French elections, anti-government protests broke out in Sri Lanka, Peru and Tunisia, while strikes unfolded of Indian public sector workers, Spanish truckers, Canadian rail workers, and US and British refinery workers. With the surge in inflation and the intensification of war, the financial aristocracy is setting a collision course with the working class.

The party that must be built in France is the PES. There is no progressive solution to war, a global pandemic, and a deepening global economic crisis outside of social revolution. Facing crises on such a scale, workers' struggles must be linked up with the great Marxist-Trotskyist revolutionary heritage of the working class, in a historical reckoning with the forces that in the 20th century tied the working class to Stalinism and national union bureaucracies. That is the task of the PES and its sister parties in the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).

A balance sheet of Macron's presidency

In the 2017 presidential runoff between Macron and Le Pen, the PES called for an active boycott. Amid protests and rising anger among workers and youth against a poisoned choice between Macron and Le Pen, the PES insisted that Macron, an investment banker and then-PS economy minister, was not a lesser evil and would pursue an equally reactionary policy. The only viable perspective was to build a movement in the working class against whichever candidate won.

This position—opposed to that of Mélenchon's LFI and the Pabloite NPA, who made clear their preference for Macron over Le Pen—has been vindicated. Macron's presidency reacted to an explosion of class struggle by impelling official politics ever further to the far right.

Macron began his presidency with a "Republican salute" to Le Pen in his victory speech on election night. He moved promptly to slash social

programs. Coordinating closely with the trade union bureaucracies, he prepared deep cuts to pensions, unemployment insurance, and rail workers' wages. The first great eruption of opposition to his policies came not from the unions, but from an international movement that was erupting outside of them.

The year 2018 saw teachers strikes across the United States, anti-government protests in Sudan and in France, "yellow vest" protests against social inequality. Before the "yellow vest" protests were over, mass protests and strikes had spread across every continent. Organizing on social media, the "yellow vests" occupied highways and city streets; their protests grew into an all-out clash with the police state. As he sent riot police against the "yellow vests," Macron hailed France's World War II-era Nazi-collaborationist dictator, convicted traitor Philippe Pétain, as a "great soldier."

The "yellow vests" faced the venomous hatred of all of official France, and broad sympathy among workers. The union bureaucracy called off a truckers strike as the "yellow vest" protests began, and the unions and the NPA slandered the "yellow vests" as neo-fascists. Macron, who put a helicopter on 24-hour alert to evacuate him in case he fell into the hands of the French people, authorized the army to fire on the "yellow vests" in March 2019. It was the first time such orders had been given in France since 1948 and the mass strikes after the fall of the Pétain regime.

While the army did not fire, the "yellow vests" faced militarized repression on a level unseen in decades: armored cars, water cannon, and hordes of riot police. Over 10,000 protesters were arrested and jailed for questioning and over 4,400 wounded; two dozen lost an eye to rubber bullets, five lost hands to police grenades, and one bystander was killed. This was followed in 2019-2020 by France's longest rail strike, held against Macron's pension cuts, since May 1968.

The key experience of Macron's presidency was the COVID-19 pandemic and his policy of "living with the virus." Initially, spontaneous strikes for a shelter-at-home policy spread from Italy and the United States across Europe, and Macron was forced to agree to a strict lockdown. However, after lifting it in May 2020, Macron and the entire European Union (EU) refused calls from medical authorities for policies to trace and isolate cases and eliminate spread of the virus.

The contrast between China and the EU exposes the staggering human cost of Macron's policy of social murder. After its lockdown, China eliminated transmission of the virus and returned for many months to near-normal conditions, until the virus was re-imported from abroad. With 1.4 billion inhabitants, it lost less than 5,000 lives, and only five after July 2020. Europe, with half China's population, lost nearly 2 million lives, including 142,000 in France; over 1.5 million deaths in Europe and 110,000 in France came after Macron ended the strict lockdown.

The ICFI explained that the COVID-19 pandemic was a trigger event in world history, as World War I triggered the October revolution in Russia. It massively escalated the crisis of world capitalism, setting it on a course either to catastrophic war or to social revolution.

The financial aristocracy and the political establishment were concerned not with saving lives but saving their wealth. The EU adopted multi-trillion-euro bailouts of public funds to the banks and the financial markets, massively inflating stock markets and the wealth of the investing classes. These sent EU public debt soaring, with France's debt reaching a massive 115 percent of its Gross Domestic Product. This unviable pyramid of debt was financed by keeping workers at work, no matter what the cost in lives lost to COVID-19.

The affluent middle-class layers that lead the union bureaucracies and pseudo-left parties like LFI and the NPA supported the policy of social murder. This reflected their material interests: corporate cash handouts helped subsidize union budgets and boosted stock market portfolios.

As the EU and China both prepared the end of their lockdowns, in the spring of 2020, Mélenchon made clear that LFI knew EU policy would

lead to mass death in France. He said that LFI, as it debated what to do on the pandemic, had looked for inspiration to the pro-imperialist Holy Union of social-democrats, liberals and far-right forces during World War I. He stated: "We looked in the 1915-1916 laws to see what was done... All the men were at the front, dying by the millions. It interested us to see how to guarantee social cohesion in such times."

They worked to strangle working class opposition to Macron's COVID-19 policy. Though over 75 percent of the French people supported COVID-19 vaccines, LFI endorsed anti-vaccine mandate protests led by Marine Le Pen's niece Marion Maréchal Le Pen last year. This year, LFI, the NPA, LO and other pseudo-left groups endorsed "freedom convoys" modeled on far-right protests in Canada, demanding an end to public health measures to halt the spread of the virus.

These reactionary policies paved the way for a fascistic and militaristic turn by the French ruling elite. Amid a mounting crisis of its military occupation of Mali, it escalated attacks on immigrants and Muslims. Interior Minister Gérard Darmanin, a sympathizer of the far-right *Action française* organization, rammed through draconian laws governing Muslim associations and facilitating their surveillance and disbanding by the state. Darmanin publicly attacked Le Pen as "soft on Islam."

Broad sections of the officer corps supportive of the anti-vax movement began issuing calls for a coup in France. These forces, around retired General Pierre de Villiers, whose father backed the failed April 1961 coup against Algeria's independence from France, are lavishly funded by major corporations of France's CAC-40 stock index. They backed the fascistic presidential candidacy of far-right journalist Eric Zemmour, an apologist for the Vichy regime who has repeatedly been convicted of incitement of racial and religious hatred.

Above all, there came a sharp shift in foreign policy. Macron had portrayed himself as a more responsible figure, criticizing NATO as "brain dead" for risking a clash with Russia. However, as the ICFI has explained, the COVID-19 pandemic was a trigger event, and this year the trigger was pulled.

Macron responded to Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine by unreservedly aligning himself on NATO's arming of the Ukrainian regime for war with Russia. As calls mount in US and European media for regime change in Russia and the overthrow and murder of Putin, and a potential NATO military intervention in Ukraine, it is evident that the danger of a direct clash between NATO and Russia provoking a world war is growing.

Despite the historical memory in the working class of the Soviet Union's role in defeating Nazi armies that occupied France during World War II, the anti-Russian policy is unopposed in the French political establishment. The NPA, Mélenchon, and the Stalinist General Confederation of Labor (CGT) union, a close ally of the Soviet bureaucracy during the Cold War, openly endorsed the war. Other forces, like LO's Nathalie Arthaud, aligned with NATO by calling on workers to support the trade unions' positions.

Macron's presidency has witnessed a comprehensive repudiation of France's democratic traditions by the French bourgeoisie, and of any even symbolic link to Marxism by pseudo-left parties grounded in Stalinism and Pabloism and their trade union allies. The Marxist-internationalist alternative to these bankrupt and politically rotten forces is the PES, the French section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), basing itself on the political heritage of the ICFI's defense of Trotskyism against the pseudo-left.

The collapse of the PS, the PCF and their satellites

The 30 years since the Stalinist bureaucracy's dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 have vindicated the ICFI's assessment of the current epoch. In the 1990s, demoralized Stalinists and bourgeois propagandists alike claimed the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union marked the "End of History" and the final triumph of capitalist democracy. The market, in this view, would guarantee prosperity and democracy within the nation-state system.

The ICFI, on the other hand, explained that the dissolution of the Soviet Union did not change the prognosis of the great Marxists of the era of World War I and the October revolution. Capitalism, beset by fatal contradictions, leads either to world war or to world socialist revolution.

The ICFI analyzed the dissolution of the Soviet Union as part of an insoluble crisis of the nation-state system, which had broken at its economically weakest link. It pointed to the implications of the globalization of production and the emergence of transnational industrial supply chains. This not only intensified the crisis of the nation-state system. It rendered all organizations that advanced a national program for the working class—not only Stalinist regimes, but also social-democratic and Stalinist parties and unions—historically obsolete.

Thirty years later, the ICFI's position on the "End of History" thesis has been vindicated. Even the American president, Joe Biden, says history is at an "inflection point" and admits that, in his discussions of policy with US generals, they bandy about the figure of 40 to 60 million dead in the coming wars for the "new world order." After Trump's unprecedented attempt on January 6, 2021 to mount a coup in Washington, Biden has admitted that he does not know whether the United States will still be a democracy in 10 years.

This hysterical offensive of reaction places socialist revolution by the working class on the order of the day. The ICFI's irreconcilable opposition to nationalism and to Stalinism's false theory of "socialism in one country" places it in conflict with the tendencies that French media promoted as "left" or "Trotskyist" parties.

In 1953, the ICFI split with the political ancestors of the Pabloite NPA, who advocated dissolving the Fourth International into Stalinist, reformist and bourgeois nationalist parties. Other tendencies, like Workers Struggle (LO) and Pierre Lambert's Internationalist Communist Organization (OCI)—the ICFI's earlier French section, which broke with the ICFI in 1971—supported the PS-PCF Union of the Left and sought out alliances with Pabloism. Today, they all stand exposed as bankrupt.

Their orientation to the big-business PS and the Stalinist PCF, rooted in the interests of layers of the post-1968 middle class, was founded on a rejection of the revolutionary role of the working class and a nationalist orientation to political maneuvers within the national borders of France.

Capitalism did not create peace and prosperity, but the political, economic and military disintegration of the Soviet Union. This paved the way for a wave of imperialist wars from 1991 to today, from Iraq to Somalia, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, and Mali. Over the decades, the NATO alliance absorbed virtually all of Eastern Europe, marching to the very western borders of Russia. At the same time, under the aegis of the European Union (EU), the bourgeoisie oversaw the impoverishment of broad layers of the European working class.

The PS and the PCF, the dominant parties in the French working class of the post-World War II era, have disintegrated, standing at 2 and 4 percent, respectively, in the polls. Their austerity policies when in power, and the betrayal of countless strikes and protest movements by trade unions affiliated to them, have discredited them among broad layers of the working class.

Their bankrupt nationalism has created the conditions for Le Pen's neo-fascist RN to rise, carefully downplaying her party's historical links to Nazism and the Holocaust. She demagogically promises to protect the French people as the PS and PCF have not, lowering the retirement age to 60 and enacting a "tax on financial fortunes." Her attacks on immigrants

and Muslims, her hailing of the police, and her appeals for "social peace"—that is, the repression of strikes and protests—are largely indistinguishable from those of Macron, the PS and their political satellites.

But Le Pen's economic policies are tailored on the needs of French banks, not French workers. While she exploits a toxic anti-immigrant atmosphere created by the capitalist media, genuine hatred of immigrants is not widespread. A poll last year found that 89 percent of French people oppose her "national preference" policy of discrimination on wages and benefits in favor of French citizens in the workplace, while 60 percent support legalizing all immigrants.

Should Le Pen win election, she will sooner rather than later come into conflict with the working class. The decisive question in the French presidential election is not who will win election, but how the working class will fight whichever president is elected.

What does the PES advocate?

• The mobilization of workers in France and internationally against NATO imperialism and the mounting danger of world war and nuclear war.

The PES opposes Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine. However, it insists that the necessary mobilization of workers and youth against war requires not only opposition to Putin's war, but also and above all to the war drive of the NATO imperialist powers, including France. Otherwise, criticism of the Kremlin's foreign policy, however it is intended, simply ends up echoing NATO war propaganda against Russia.

The war in Ukraine is the disastrous product of the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union. The Stalinist theory of "peaceful coexistence" with imperialism, based on which it dissolved the Soviet Union, proved no less false than "socialism in one country." NATO not only has absorbed Eastern Europe virtually up to Russia's borders but, especially since the 2014 NATO-backed coup in Kiev, armed the Ukrainian regime. Now it is waging a proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, pouring billions of dollars into Ukrainian army units and far-right nationalist militias like the Azov Battalion.

This conflict poses an imminent threat of nuclear war. Russia is outclassed by NATO, whose armies are three times larger, whose population is six times larger, and whose economy is 20 times larger than Russia's. NATO and Ukrainian statements demanding Putin's ouster, calling to break up Russia, and denouncing Russians as "orcs" fit for massacre, make clear Russia faces an existential threat. If NATO acts on calls from Poland or other Eastern European powers to invade Ukraine to attack Russian forces, the escalation to full-scale nuclear war could be very rapid.

International tensions are mounting even inside NATO. In its 2017 National Security Strategy, Washington called to prepare for great power conflict with Russia and China, after which it formed an Australia-UK-US alliance excluding France. Amid the NATO war drive against Russia, Germany, with whom France has fought three bloody wars since 1870, tripled its military budget to €150 billion. In France, Macron is calling to raise the retirement age to 65 and massively boost university fees to pour billions more into France's military.

Over 70 percent of the French population opposes French intervention in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and an anti-war movement must be built. It cannot be built, however, in the post-1968 middle class milieu that emerged from the anti-Vietnam war movement, which is now pro-war. It must be built in the working class. The PES calls for broad discussion of

the war danger by youth and workers and calls on opponents of NATO war to seek out discussion with workers on social media and in workplaces and factories.

- **A Zero Covid policy**

Macron's vaccine-only strategy for mass infection, universally supported by the French presidential candidates, will not stop the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite high vaccination rates, Europe has seen around 300,000 COVID-19 deaths this winter; France still sees about 1 million infections and 1,000 deaths each week. Together with the emergence of new COVID-19 variants and gradual waning of immunity from vaccination, this and much worse is the future offered by capitalism.

The PES calls for the formation of safety committees in workplaces and schools to monitor health, fight the spread of the virus, and educate workers in the best ways to do so.

The PES and the ICFI are organizing a Global Workers Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic and fighting to educate the working class on the necessity for a Zero COVID policy. The PES encourages workers and scientists to participate in this inquest and irreconcilably opposes pseudo-left calls to scrap public health measures to prevent contagion.

- **Build committees of action, organize workers independently against austerity and repression**

The ICFI is the only political tendency seeking to build and link up internationally workplace organizations of struggle, independent of and opposed to the corrupt, pro-corporate unions. The fuel for such a movement is to be found in workers' anger at social conditions created by decades of austerity and police-state repression under successive governments of all colorations.

The once-vaunted French social model has collapsed. Broad layers of workers cannot afford basic necessities. Fully 60 percent of working-age people fear falling into poverty, one-quarter do not earn enough to eat three healthy meals per day, and 10 percent rely on food charity. Reeling from the surge of gas prices, which rose from around €1.52 to €2.11 per liter on average in March, workers now face the prospect of a spending thousands of euros per year for natural gas whenever the current state price freeze expires, currently set for the end of 2022.

Apart from a small layer of better-paid workers and professionals, the reforms pledged by the 1930s PS-PCF Popular Front era—paid vacations and job security—are a distant memory. Fully 40 percent of French people never leave for vacations, and 70 percent of those who do stay at friends' houses. Last year, 21 million jobs offered in France were temporary work, and in French auto factories, 60 to 90 percent of production jobs are carried out by temp workers.

The fight to reconquer basic social rights, end COVID-19 deaths and oppose imperialist war cannot be entrusted to the national union bureaucracies in corporatist talks with the state. Any serious industrial struggle against transnational corporations requires workers to organize independently of the unions and across national borders. For that purpose, the PES advances the ICFI's call to build the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

- **For equality, for the expropriation of the financial aristocracy**

The financial aristocracy has been enriched by trillions of euros through the printing of public money by major central banks. Handed over to financial speculators, these funds fueled inflation and massively increased state debt but boosted stock markets. European billionaires alone, leaving out multi-millionaires, enriched themselves to the tune of over \$1 trillion. Individual mega-billionaires like Bernard Arnault or Françoise Bettencourt-Meyers increased their wealth by 40 percent or more in just the first year after the bailouts began in the summer of 2020.

A parasitic aristocracy, who obtained profits on their ill-gotten capital by making workers labor in unsafe conditions at the cost of millions of lives during the pandemic, is plundering society. It makes a mockery of pledges of "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" inscribed on official buildings

across France. Public funds pilfered by private hands must be impounded and used to serve the urgent social needs of the population. This requires the transfer of state power into the hands of the working class, across the euro zone and beyond.

Such proposals, built on the strength of the international working class, the struggle for its political independence and the necessity for it to take power, identify the PES as a Marxist-internationalist tendency oriented to the working class—a Trotskyist party.

They fundamentally distinguish the PES from all the parties running in the 2022 presidential elections. Despite their bitter conflicts, all of them are united on scrapping COVID-19 protection measures, pursuing aggressive policies against Russia and China, boosting French military spending to 2 percent of GDP or more, and continuing the financial policy of bank bailouts of the super-rich. They are on course towards an explosive confrontation with the working class.

The bankrupt nationalism of Jean-Luc Mélenchon

Jean-Luc Mélenchon—currently the leading electoral challenger to Le Pen and Macron, calling to lower the retirement age to 60 and for an amnesty of the "yellow vests"—is a longtime political operative of French imperialism. He joined the PS in 1976 after several years in the OCI. From inside the PS, he first protested against but then endorsed France's participation in the 1991 Gulf War against Iraq and the launching of the euro. He was a minister in Lionel Jospin's PS-PCF-Green "Plural Left" government of 1997-2002, before founding what would become LFI in 2009.

Mélenchon promotes French nationalism against socialism and the working class. He cynically applauded the "yellow vests" as a national "popular revolution," which he held up as the alternative to an international socialist revolution, which he opposes. But he did not lift a finger to help the "yellow vests" against the cops. Even though he won 7 million votes in 2017, largely in working class districts of major cities, he did not once appeal to his voters to mobilize in defense of strikes or protests attacked by Macron's police.

On COVID-19, LFI opposed Macron from the right, echoing calls by far right politicians Florian Philippot and Marion Maréchal Le Pen to protest against vaccine mandates, even though over 90 percent of French adults chose to be vaccinated. LFI also endorsed "liberty convoys" in Europe against COVID-19 health restrictions.

Despite his cult of French national independence, which LFI combines with chauvinist criticisms of Muslim headscarves, Mélenchon and his allies have backed the NATO war drive against Russia in Ukraine. He inevitably criticizes America and NATO. However, he also claims falsely that Moscow bears "total responsibility" for the war in Ukraine, and endorses sanctions against Russia as "effective." He thus helps block left-wing opposition to NATO's imperialist war drive.

Mélenchon has not campaigned against the mounting danger of a coup promoted by figures such as Zemmour and de Villiers, but only briefly spoken out once to ask Macron to keep them in line. This reflects not only his role as a servant of French imperialism, but also the friendships he developed with reactionaries like Zemmour in the politically-diseased milieu of the PS.

Mélenchon has turned so far to the right that he garnered an endorsement from Geoffroy Roux de Bézieux, the head of the French employers' federation, the Medef. Roux de Bézieux said, "Yes, our disagreements are deep. But even we opponents recognize it: the left's favorite for the presidential election is ready to govern, with a solid and coherent program." This is an unmistakable sign that Mélenchon, should

he be elected, will implement the diktat of the banks.

Those who have any doubt as to whether Mélenchon will ultimately capitulate to the financial aristocracy should look at the record of his Spanish allies, Podemos. In government, they oversaw a policy of mass infection that led to at least 152,000 excess deaths in the pandemic, protected generals linked to the fascistic Vox party who called for a coup and joined the NATO war drive. Podemos massively deployed riot police to attack a strike by tens of thousands of Cadiz metalworkers and a nationwide Spanish truckers strike.

The reactionary role of the New Anti-capitalist Party and Workers Struggle

The international upsurge of the class struggle, the COVID-19 pandemic and the NATO war drive against Russia and China have conclusively exposed the NPA and LO. The ICFI's opposition to the NPA and LO is not a quarrel within the Trotskyist movement, but the struggle of the Trotskyist movement against reactionary, petty bourgeois parties.

The 2002 presidential election was a critical experience that, two decades ago, already exposed the NPA and LO as part of the established order. When PS candidate Lionel Jospin was eliminated in the first round, protests erupted against a runoff between conservative Jacques Chirac and neo-fascist Jean-Marie Le Pen. The LCR, LO and the Workers Party (PT, the ex-OCI) had together won 3 million votes in the first round. Moreover, international antiwar protests were erupting against the upcoming, illegal US invasion of Iraq that took place in 2003.

The ICFI issued an open letter to the three parties, proposing a campaign for an active boycott of the runoff. Without hiding its political differences with these parties, the ICFI explained that an active boycott, mobilizing workers in struggle, would best prepare the working class to oppose Chirac's wars and social attacks. However, the pseudo-left parties did not respond, instead aligning with the PS campaign for a Chirac vote arguing that Chirac would save democracy from fascism.

Effectively, these parties told the millions of people who mobilized against Le Pen that they should not have bothered to march and protest. They could have simply allowed the election to take place and Chirac to take power. This gave the neo-fascists a political opening, allowing them to posture as the sole opposition party and turn themselves into contenders for power.

The central ingredient in the "de-demonization" of the far right was, however, the drastic shift to the right of the entire political establishment after 2002. The far right integrated itself into mainstream politics not because the neo-fascists turned to the centre, but because mainstream politics turned far to the right. Indeed, the NPA played a leading role in shamelessly promoting not only NATO wars in Libya and Syria, but also the 2014 far-right putsch in Kiev, as "democratic revolutions."

Under Macron, the NPA and LO were dismayed by the eruption of class struggle and social protest. As CGT union head Philippe Martinez's claim that "yellow vests" demanding social equality were "people you couldn't be with," the NPA slandered them as a "far right mob." This only exposed the class gulf separating the affluent petty-bourgeois base of the pseudo left parties from broad masses of workers and oppressed middle-class people.

The COVID-19 pandemic has confirmed the reactionary role of these parties. Poutou and Arthaud both denounced vaccine mandates and endorsed the far-right "liberty convoys," and tacitly backed multi-trillion-euro EU pandemic bailouts to the super-rich. The affluent middle-class operatives of the pseudo-left are now politically implicated in the EU's policy of social murder. Whereas the NPA's slogan used to be "Our lives

are worth more than their profits," its message to the workers today is, "Our profits are worth more than your lives."

Despite the mounting risk of nuclear war, the NPA and LO have lined up behind NATO on the Russian invasion of Ukraine and NATO's launching of a war against Russia in Ukraine. While LO insists that such issues should be decided by the trade unions, whose leaders have endorsed NATO, the NPA was even more brazen. It published statements by NPA member Gilbert Achcar calling for a NATO defeat of Russia as the only way to ensure world peace.

The figure of Achcar epitomizes the evolution of the affluent petty-bourgeois pseudo-left from former student radicals to conscious tools of imperialism. A professor at London's School of Oriental and African Studies who advised the CIA-linked Syrian National Council in the early stages of the NATO war in Syria, Achcar now openly boasts of serving as a paid advisor of the British military.

Build the PES!

As disillusionment and anger mounts with the establishment parties in France, the critical question facing workers and youth is the building of the PES as the Trotskyist vanguard of the working class.

Macron's presidency saw a global upsurge of the class struggle. Beyond the struggles in France, there were US auto, mine and education workers strikes; a national teachers strike in Poland; mass anti-government protests across the Middle East and Latin America, including the *hirak* in Algeria; general strikes and mass farmers protests in India; a wave of wildcat strikes in industrial firms in Turkey, mass anti-government protests in Sri Lanka; and a global wave of health and education strikes over the pandemic.

It proved impossible, however, to break free of the reactionary influence of bankrupt national organizations without consciously setting out to build a unified international movement. The danger of nuclear war, the global COVID-19 pandemic, the turn to police-state rule, and the impoverishment of workers by world financial markets are all international problems. Not a single one can be addressed by parties working at the level of individual nation-states, or without a direct assault on the obscene wealth of the financial aristocracy.

The ICFI is fighting to build the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, as an organization of struggle for an era of globalized capitalism, global supply chains, and the bankruptcy of national trade unions. The political work to sustain such an organization in the face of opposition from petty-bourgeois pseudo-left parties and trade unions can only be carried out by a revolutionary party irreconcilably hostile to imperialist war, the COVID-19 pandemic, and austerity.

Throughout Macron's presidency, and especially since the COVID-19 pandemic and the war drive against Russia, the feelings and aspirations of masses of workers and youth were suppressed. Workers and youth overwhelmingly supported vaccination and hoped authorities would do more to limit the spread of COVID-19. A massive 70 percent majority opposed direct French military involvement in the Ukraine conflict. However, no established party gave voice to these views.

It is only by fighting to build a new international revolutionary vanguard, based on the legacy of the struggles of the Marxist-Trotskyist movement, that workers and youth can work out their positions on the basic political issues they face. The PES bases itself on the ICFI's decades-long struggle for Trotskyism against Stalinism, Pabloism, petty-bourgeois nationalism and all forms of national opportunism. It advances itself as the representative of the ICFI and of Trotskyism in France.

As part of its international collaboration with the ICFI, the PES works

closely with its sections and sympathizing groups in Europe to unify the working class in the struggle for the United Socialist States of Europe. In Germany the *Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei* is leading opposition to the rearmament of German imperialism among workers and youth, while the Socialist Equality Party (Britain) led the struggle for the unity of British and European workers against both pro-Brexit and pro-EU forces in Britain. In Turkey, Sosyalist E?itlik fights to build the Turkish section of the ICFI.

As the PES appeals to workers and youth sympathetic to its policies in France and internationally to join and build the sections of the ICFI, it again stresses the nature of the revolutionary movement it is seeking to build in the international working class:

- The new antiwar movement must be anti-capitalist and socialist, since there can be no serious struggle against war except in the fight to end the dictatorship of finance capital and put an end to the economic system that is the fundamental cause of militarism and war.
- The new antiwar movement must therefore, of necessity, be completely and unequivocally independent of, and hostile to, all political parties and organizations of the capitalist class.
- The new antiwar movement must, above all, be international, mobilizing the vast power of the working class in a unified global struggle against imperialism.



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