No to Macron and Le Pen! For an active boycott of the 2022 French elections!

Parti de l'égalité socialiste (France)
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Sunday's first round of the French presidential elections has led to a run-off between incumbent President Emmanuel Macron and neo-fascist candidate Marine Le Pen.

As in the 2002 and 2017 elections, France's bankrupt political establishment has left voters with the "choice" between a reactionary "president of the rich" and the leader of France's main neo-fascist party. Regardless of the outcome, the election will produce an extreme-right government dedicated to an escalation of attacks on the working class.

The Parti de l'égalité socialiste (PES), the French section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), calls for an active boycott of the run-off. It proposes to workers and youth not to vote in the elections and to advocate a conscious political rejection of the poisoned choice between Macron and Le Pen. Campaigning among workers and youth for such a boycott is taking collective action to prepare the working class for the confrontation that will inevitably take place whichever candidate wins.

In the 2022 elections, a series of parties that dominated official politics for a half-century collapsed. The Gaullist Republicans (LR) party, the big business Socialist Party (PS) and the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF) all received less than 5 percent of the vote. Le Pen got her votes by exploiting deep social anger and frustration, above all, with the PS and PCF. Her vote is concentrated among older voters and in small towns and rural areas that were once PS or PCF bastions but were devastated by these parties' austerity measures.

Millions of people, looking for a left-wing alternative to both Macron and Le Pen, voted for Jean-Luc Mélenchon of Unsubmissive France (LFI). His vote reflected a radicalization of youth and urban workers that is taking place after two years of the COVID-19 pandemic and amid the NATO war drive against Russia. Mélenchon won the vote among people under 35. He carried the Paris metropolitan area, Marseille, Toulouse, Lille, Montpellier and a total of 10 of France's 16 largest cities, primarily by winning in working class neighborhoods.

Mélenchon won 22 percent of the vote, only 1 percentage point less than Le Pen. Mélenchon did not take this as a mandate to fight, however, but demanded that his voters support Macron and announced that he will retire from politics before the next election. Sunday night, while admitting that France faces "a political state of emergency," he lamely called for a Macron vote, repeatedly chanting: "You must not give any votes to Mrs. Le Pen!"

The Parti de l'égalité socialiste (PES) rejects with contempt the lie that a vote for Macron is a weapon against the danger of fascism or that Mélenchon voters must vote for Macron to oppose Le Pen. Such arguments totally disregard the lessons of the 2017 elections.

In 2017, facing the same situation of a runoff between Macron and Le Pen, Mélenchon made no call to vote, ambiguously saying his voters would know what to do—thus aligning himself with media propaganda that workers had to vote Macron as a lesser evil than Le Pen. The PES, on the other hand, called for an active boycott, warning that Macron is not a lesser evil than Le Pen. Its position was vindicated.

Macron has pursued a violently reactionary policy. He imposed decrees to accelerate mass sackings and slash rail workers' wages, provoking protests in 2018-19 organized via social media: the "yellow vests." He responded by hailing France's Nazi collaborationist dictator, Philippe Pétain, as a "great soldier" and unleashing riot police on the "yellow vests." Over 10,000 were arrested and 4,400 wounded.

As Macron's poll ratings plummeted, he relied ever more directly on far-right forces. He did nothing as fascistic officers around retired General Pierre de Villiers

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demanded harsher repression of the “yellow vests” and threatened a coup to re-establish “authority.” His interior minister, Gérald Darmanin, a sympathizer of the far-right Action Française, sponsored a law imposing discriminatory obligations on Muslim associations. Darmanin even publicly attacked Le Pen as “soft” on Islam.

On the global COVID-19 pandemic, Macron championed the European Union policy of “living with the virus.” Initially forced by a wave of strikes to impose a strict lockdown recommended by scientists, he refused to set up necessary contact-and-trace programs to halt a resurgence of the virus after the lockdown ended. As a result, the virus returned, claiming 1.8 million lives in Europe and 142,000 in France—unlike in China, where it was largely kept in check after the lockdown and life returned to normal. Today, Macron is eliminating all measures to limit contagion.

This year, Macron aligned France with the reckless US-NATO escalation of a conflict with Russia after Russian President Vladimir Putin’s reactionary invasion of Ukraine. US President Biden has stated the Pentagon is considering a figure of 45 to 60 million deaths in wars to decide who will “lead” a “new world order.” Yet Macron has aligned himself with the pyromaniac in Washington, arming far-right militias in Ukraine and imposing sanctions on trade in vital commodities with Russia.

Mélenchon’s LFI and the various parties of the middle class worked constantly to block left-wing opposition to Macron. They called no protests by their voters in defense of the “yellow vests,” supported unpopular anti-vaccine protests led by the far right and aligned with the US-NATO war drive against Russia. By strangling left-wing opposition to Macron, they allowed the far right to posture as Macron’s leading opponent.

This paved the way for Le Pen to fraudulently claim to be a defender of social welfare policies. Her previous ties to Russian officials make her seem less militarily reckless against Russia than Macron. The Macron government’s constant resort to police violence and its attacks on Muslims’ democratic rights also made her praise of the police and her anti-immigrant policies seem mainstream.

Le Pen is, however, a ruthless neo-fascist whose policy, if she is elected, will prove no less bloody than Macron. Her election would not lead to a rebirth of France but drag it through the mud.

The policies of France’s next president will be shaped, first and foremost, by the disintegration of the world capitalist system. Amid the mass deaths and economic devastation of the global pandemic, the imperialist war drive is setting into motion an international attack on the working class.

Polls show the 76 percent of French people are worried about nuclear war. Concern is mounting about surging prices and shortages at the gas pump and in supermarkets for key products like cooking oil, toilet paper and eggs.

The great task facing workers and youth is to prepare politically for the confrontation that is brewing between the next president and the working class. As it campaigns for an active boycott, the PES calls on workers and youth to form action committees as a first step in organizing and coordinating struggles and unifying workers with other organizations of struggle created by workers elsewhere in France and internationally.

In such a struggle, revolutionary leadership is essential. The PES bases itself on the unbroken continuity of the struggle of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) for Trotskyism and against social democracy, Stalinism and all forms of petty-bourgeois opportunism.

The vote for Mélenchon demonstrates, in the distorted form of the election, that the broad mass of the working class is moving to the left. Along with workers throughout the world, French workers are looking for a way to fight against inequality, war, the rise of the far right and the criminal response of the ruling class to the pandemic. Mélenchon’s decision to slither away rather than fight, however, demonstrates that this sentiment can only be realized politically in the conscious fight for international socialism.

The PES urges workers and youth who agree with this program to contact us, fight for an active boycott against Macron and Le Pen and help build the PES as the mass party of the working class in France.

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