Stalinist PCF wiped out after lackluster French presidential campaign

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Fabien Roussel, the candidate of the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF), was eliminated in Sunday's first round of the French presidential election with just 2.3 percent of the vote. Despite mounting working class concern and anger at rising inflation, NATO war policies targeting Russia and the COVID-19 pandemic, the PCF could not and did not make any appeal to working class voters. Instead, it campaigned based on policies of austerity and support for NATO.

Fifty years since the PCF signed a Common Program with the big business Socialist Party (PS) and 30 years after it supported the Soviet bureaucracy's dissolution of the Soviet Union, the PCF has utterly collapsed. Roussel's campaign was virtually indistinguishable from that of a right-wing bourgeois party. On the war and the pandemic, Roussel largely criticized incumbent President Emmanuel Macron from the right.

The PCF's decision to run independently met significant internal opposition. PCF Deputy Elsa Faucillon, from the "unionist" wing that called for support of Unsubmissive France (LFI) candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon, said, "[w]hen I see left-wing candidates doing everything to ensure that a left-wing candidate is not in the second round, while the far right is at the gates, I'm enraged!"

Had Roussel's 2.3 percent of the vote been added to Mélenchon's 22 percent, the resulting 24.3 percent would have beaten Le Pen's 23.1 percent, putting Mélenchon on the second round.

Speaking to *Le Monde*, Roussel rejected criticism of his decision to run an independent campaign. "The presidential election is not a three-racks game, it's not a question of chances; it's a question of conviction, authenticity, and sincerity. … When you want happy days, you vote for happy days!"

After the election, Roussel blamed his rout on "The so-called 'useful' vote [which] largely served the three leading candidates, to the detriment of all the others." He then called on PCF voters to back Macron in the second round against Le Pen.

Roussel, the PCF and the entire pseudo-left milieu in France are painfully conscious of mounting working class frustration with reactionary Green or feminist identity politics that underlie their own activities. As such, he cynically centered his campaign on inciting bankrupt, French nationalist frustration with ecological issues.

Roussel criticized "a certain left" which "has given up on upsetting the dominant interests." He told *Libération*: "I don't want to be part of this self-righteous ecologist left, which not only gives lessons, but also makes the French feel guilty because they build a house in the countryside, makes the French feel guilty because they fly the blue-white-red flag there." In one oft-cited tweet, he wrote, "Good wine, good meat, good cheese: that's French gastronomy. The best way to defend it is to allow the French to have access to it."

Roussel's concern with discussing country homes and choice cuts of meat in the current political context speaks to the PCF's role as a bureaucracy staffed by affluent, self-involved layers of the middle class. Amid the mounting danger of a US/NATO-Russia war, a pandemic and mass inflation, the PCF concentrated on building itself up as a flag-waving party concerned with a "patriotic" diet.

In the same interview with *Libération*, Roussel declared his allegiance to the financial aristocracy. "I explained to Geoffroy Roux de Bézieux (head of the MEDEF business federation): I am not the enemy of the bosses, but the one who wants to work with them in the interest of the country." He went on to assure the

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billionaires and corporations, “Some will say, I am nationalizing. Not me!”

Roussel promoted nationalist nostalgia for “The France of the Happy Days,” referring to the famous reform program the PCF adopted after the end of the Nazi occupation and World War II.

At that time, the conditions existed for the seizure of power by the working class. A wave of general strikes and armed insurrections against fascist rule had shaken Europe, and significant layers of the working class were armed. Workers streamed into the PCF, making it France’s largest political party with over 1 million worker members. The PCF had played a central role in Stalin’s campaign to slander and assassinate Leon Trotsky, including supporting the lies of the Moscow Trials. It was not a Marxist-internationalist but a Stalinist and nationalist party.

On directions from Stalin, the PCF instead gave full support to the maintenance of the capitalist state machine of the Nazi collaborationist regime, with bourgeois resistance leader Charles de Gaulle as its new leader. The PCF agreed to block strikes and, when it could not stop them from going forward, to isolate them and facilitate police repression by the state.

Nostalgia for this period reflects the outlook of these Stalinist union bureaucrats opposed to a struggle for socialist revolution, indifferent to the resulting survival of far-right politics in Europe, and who are trying to set a trap for the working class. The current historical epoch is no longer one of a choice between a Trotskyist revolutionary policy and Stalinist proposals for reforms. There is no national reform policy in the era of capitalist globalization. The choice is not reform or revolution, but revolution or counterrevolution.

At times Roussel presented the PCF campaign as a return to “a popular, sincere and red label left” less impacted by identity politics of race and gender that dominate the French pseudo-left. As social conditions worsen, ever larger numbers of workers and youth view the pseudo-left parties’ identity politics with disgust. In reality, however, the PCF is fully aligned with the bourgeoisie’s assault on the working class, which they assist by promoting French nationalism.

The Stalinists are dropping even the semblance of opposition to imperialist war, efforts to build up a fascistic police state and the promotion of racism against the country’s Muslim minority.

In a campaign speech at Mérignac, Roussel called for “an increase in the means of the police.” In May 2021, he joined a police march outside the National Assembly alongside Macron’s fascistic Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin and far-right presidential candidate Eric Zemmour. Last year, the PCF also voted in favor of Article 4 of Macron’s anti-Separatism law targeting Muslims.

In response to Russia’s reactionary invasion of Ukraine, Roussel whitewashed NATO’s role in provoking the conflict. Describing Putin as bearing “exclusive responsibility for this situation,” he called for ramping up sanctions against the Russian people. Similarly, he also supported France’s war in Mali, stating that “the decision to intervene in the Sahel was justified.”

On the pandemic, Roussel is behind the ruling class’ profits-before-lives policy. When the PCF has criticized the government’s policy, it has been from the right. The PCF joined Mélenchon’s LFI, the Pabloite New Anticapitalist Party (NPA) and Workers Struggle (LO) in supporting anti-vaccination protests.

The PCF’s promotion of nationalism flows from Stalinism’s adherence to the theory of “socialism in one country,” which falsifies the proletarian internationalist orientation of Marxism and paves the way for alliances with the bourgeoisie and the existing order.

In 1995, just months ahead of millions of workers taking to the streets in France, the PCF’s presidential candidate for that year’s election, Robert Hue, told reporters, “One must not make the movement say what it is not saying. The movement today is not a movement for political change.” Amid the sharp rightward movement of the French bourgeoisie, the PCF’s pursuit of bourgeois alliances has left the PCF touting politics increasingly difficult to distinguish from the right.

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