Protests erupt throughout France against Macron and Le Pen

Samuel Tissot
17 April 2022

Days after students occupied the Sorbonne and Sciences Po universities in Paris, as well as universities in Reims and Nancy, mass protests opposed to both right-wing presidential candidate Emmanuel Macron and neo-fascist candidate Marine Le Pen broke out across France.

Thousands marched in Paris, Lyon, Nantes, Rennes, Caen, Marseille, Nice, Bordeaux, Grenoble, Lille and other cities across France. There is explosive opposition to the April 24 second round between Macron and Le Pen.

Workers and youth marched under banners reading "Neither Macron nor Le Pen," opposing a fraudulent election between these two reactionaries. The hash tag #NiMacronNiLePenAbstention was trending on Twitter throughout the weekend in France.

The Parti de l'égalité socialiste (PES), the International Committee of the Fourth International's (ICFI) French section, has called for an active boycott of the April 24 election. An open rejection of both far-right candidates is the best way to arm the working class to oppose whichever of the two extreme-right candidates wins the election.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who placed third with 22 percent of the vote, is abdicating all political responsibility to give a lead to his voters. Though he won the youth and the working class suburbs of major cities, as well as 10 of France's 16 largest urban areas, he made no effort to mobilize his vote. Even as police were violently assaulting protesters who marched on Saturday, he was merely organizing a "consultative" poll on what his voters planned to do in the second round.

According to this poll of 310,000 Mélenchon voters , 37.65 percent intend to vote blank, 28.96 percent intend to abstain and the rest to vote Macron. That is, at least two-thirds of Mélenchon's nearly 8 million voters oppose voting for either candidate on Sunday.

Nonetheless, Mélenchon and his Unsubmissive France (LFI) party are insisting that they do not have the authority to issue any political statements to their voters. They wrote "the results of this poll are not a voting instruction given to anyone. It indicates the views of the 215,292 people who took part in it. Each will conclude and will vote their conscience as they see fit." Mélenchon for his part claimed that LFI's "cohesion" was his primary concern.

That is, Mélenchon intends to tie those of his voters who are opposed to both candidates and are seeking a way to fight to the minority of LFI supporters who also back Macron. In this way, he is working to dissipate the political impact of the mass support his campaign received from millions of voters who looked to him to express left-wing opposition to Macron and Le Pen.

Mélenchon will speak on Tuesday night, the night before a televised debate between Macron and Le Pen. LFI official Mathilde Panot, the head of the party's parliamentary group in the National Assembly, again made a veiled comment to indicate her party's support for Macron, declaring that the threat posed by Le Pen is "not of the same nature" as that posed by Macron.

While Mélenchon is working to isolate protesting workers and youth and defuse mass opposition, this weekend's protests against the election were met with sharp repression. In Rennes on Saturday, riot police used tear gas and water cannon to disperse protesters. The city prefecture defended this trampling on the population's democratic right to assemble and protest on the grounds that it had not authorized a protest.

In scenes reminiscent of the police violence used to suppress "Yellow Vest" protesters earlier in Macron's presidency, in Paris police charged protesters on the

© World Socialist Web Site

Place de la République. A video showing the police pushing over a man on crutches and another showing police striking a protester on the ground with a baton were shared online.

Before the protest, another video showed the police combing metro stops in Paris to intimidate people on their way to the protests and dissuade others from joining. In response, those on a metro car chanted "freedom to protest."

Alongside an explosion of working class opposition to both candidates, the French ruling class is fearful of an expansion of recent student rebellions over the next week. Nanterre University just outside Paris, where the first occupation of May 1968 took place, has been moved completely online. Heightened security teams have been posted to all universities in the center of Paris, where additional measures such as bag searches are being imposed on students.

Nonetheless, students are planning general assemblies to organize continued opposition next week. Within the capital, students at Paris-8, in the working class suburb of St Denis, are organizing an open meeting on Tuesday, April 19.

Many of the weekend's anti-Macron and Le Pen demonstrations took place alongside ecologist and anti-Russia protests calling for further arms and support for far-right Ukrainian militias, the expansion of NATO, and more sanctions against the Russian people. An Extinction Rebellion protest occupied the Boulevard St Denis overnight without any police interference. These forces are apparently being tolerated by the security forces in part because of Green candidate Yannick Jadot's endorsement of Macron in the second round.

In response to growing anger at the election among millions of workers and youth, the union bureaucracies are scrambling to keep social anger contained within limits acceptable to the state. Ahead of the election of April 24, they are doing everything possible to channel anger against both Macron and Le Pen behind the incumbent.

On Sunday, Philippe Martinez and Laurent Berger, chiefs of the General Confederation of Labor (CGT) and French Democratic Confederation of Labour (CFDT), respectively, published a joint letter in the *Journal de Dimanche* all but calling for a Macron vote. They wrote: "The National Rally [Le Pen's party] is a danger to the fundamental rights of citizens and workers. It cannot be considered as the republican parties, respectful and guarantors of our motto: liberty, equality, fraternity. Let us not entrust it with the keys to our democracy, at the risk of losing them."

Martinez, whose union also endorsed the NATO war in Ukraine and backed trillion-euro bailouts for the rich during the pandemic, is claiming that Macron defends democracy. However, this is a political fraud. His celebration of Nazi collaborationist dictator Philippe Pétain while riot police attacked "yellow vests" protesting for social equality, his deadly policy of "living with the virus" and his discriminatory laws targeting Muslims align him firmly with the tradition of extreme-right politics in France.

Once again, as workers and youth enter into the streets to oppose Le Pen and Macron, the unions and allied pseudo-left parties like Mélenchon's LFI are attempting to stifle this opposition and lead it into a dead end. Indeed, they consistently worked to suppress opposition to every one of Macron's major social attacks against the working class over the five years of his term.

This is diametrically opposed to the sentiment of millions of workers and youth in France, however, who find the prospect of another five years of austerity, attacks on Muslims and mass death from the pandemic under Macron just as unacceptable as under Marine Le Pen. The only political party in France that reflects this left-wing sentiment of masses of workers and youth is the PES, which calls for an active boycott of the French elections and seeks to build itself in opposition to all factions of the ruling class.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site