

Macron-Le Pen second round in French elections exposes pseudo-left *Lutte ouvrière*

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Facing a second round of the French presidential election between Macron and Le Pen, “*Lutte ouvrière*” (Workers’ Struggle – LO) is reacting with a mixture of indifference and unconsciousness typical of petty-bourgeois parties. Closely linked to the union bureaucracies that push workers to vote Macron against Le Pen, LO only calls for an individual abstention on the day of the second round. LO rejects the call to build a movement to boycott the elections put forward by the *Parti de l'égalité socialiste* (PES), to mobilize workers against both extreme-right candidates.

After the first round, LO presidential candidate Nathalie Arthaud, who received 0.6 percent of the vote, observed that Macron and Le Pen “are enemies of the working class”. She added that “in this second round, the working-class electorate is being asked to choose between the plague and cholera”.

But the only possibility LO sees in this dangerous situation is to encourage its voters to make an individual, purely symbolic gesture of opposition. Arthaud said, “I refuse this choice and will vote white to reject both Macron and Le Pen!”

Voting blank is, of course, an option that is presented to voters and is a legitimate way of showing personal opposition to both candidates. However, LO – whose name proclaims that it supports workers’ struggles – offers no perspective for mobilizing this opposition into a collective working-class struggle. This attitude, based on the conservatism of layers of the trade union and academic apparatuses around LO, reflects a total and unfounded pessimism about the political potential that exists in the current situation.

Neither Macron nor Le Pen are popular. Large sections of the working-class electorate, especially those who vote left, know that both are far-right figures, militaristic and hostile to the social and democratic rights of the working class. The demonstrations that broke out in the universities and on the streets testify to the widespread unpopularity of both candidates among workers and young people.

The PES, the French section of the International

Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), is calling for an active boycott, proposing that workers and young people do not vote in these elections and reject both Macron and Le Pen. An active boycott is needed to deny legitimacy to this election and establish an independent line for the working class vis-à-vis the union bureaucracies supporting Macron. This will create the best conditions for the class struggles that will arise after the elections.

LO adopts a diametrically opposed strategy. It is aware that a call for an opposition aimed at Macron and Le Pen would receive vast support among the workers. That is why Arthaud calls them “plague” and “cholera”. However, LO fears that an independent movement rallying workers and young people would go beyond what it can tolerate, harming the political and financial ties that bind LO and the union bureaucracy to the French bourgeoisie.

Arthaud says, “Whoever wins, there is no reason to be discouraged and even less reason to bow our heads. On the contrary! The strength of the workers is not in the ballot box but in their own struggles. The main thing is that workers, pensioners and the unemployed are aware that they will have an enemy in the Elysée.”

Millions of workers are already aware that there will be an enemy in the Elysée presidential palace. If the strength of the workers is indeed in their own struggles, why not mobilize the workers in a collective struggle against this fraudulent election? But LO simply proposes to wait until the enemy is elected.

Significantly, LO maintains a total silence on Mélenchon’s reactionary manoeuvres. He won 22 percent of the vote, compared to 23 percent for Le Pen, but he has stepped back while signaling his willingness to adapt to Macron.

The vote for Mélenchon reflects the radicalization of workers and youth against the backdrop of inflation, pandemic and NATO war threats against Russia. More than 7 million voters voted for Mélenchon to express a left opposition to Macron and Le Pen. But Mélenchon betrayed his voters, refusing to mobilize them in struggle against the

Macron-Le Pen duel. On the evening of the first round, he chanted, “You must not give a single vote to Le Pen!”

If LO is concerned about the situation of the working class and the danger of the next enemy in the Élysée, it could have criticized Mélenchon from the left. As the working-class areas of France’s big cities largely voted Mélenchon, LO could propose to Mélenchon that he call for strikes against the austerity and war policies that the next president will pursue. LO union bureaucrats are present in hundreds of workplaces alongside bureaucrats linked to Mélenchon and his La France insoumise (Unsubmissive France – LFI) party.

But, like LFI, LO prefers to do nothing and limit itself to symbolic and impotent individual gestures in the voting booth. LO covers up Mélenchon’s role and tries to disarm the working class.

LO even admits that the treacherous and cowardly role of the petty-bourgeois milieu of which it is a part has played a major role in the rise of Le Pen and French neo-fascism. Thus Arthaud said, “Marine Le Pen has never been in power, which earns her a good point in certain popular circles, disgusted by the renegeing and betrayals of the left-wing parties in government”.

But what was the role of the LO during these years? The Socialist Party (Parti Socialiste — PS) and the French Communist Party (Parti Communiste Français — PCF) were the main architects of the renegeing and betrayals by successive governments falsely presented by the media as being “left-wing”. But LO made its alliances with these two parties and supported PS candidate François Hollande in the 2012 elections.

More broadly, LO is complicit in all the reactionary manoeuvres of the French ruling elite that have allowed the neo-fascists to transform themselves into contenders for power.

In 2002, the neo-fascist Jean-Marie Le Pen, father of Marine Le Pen, and the right-wing candidate Jacques Chirac reached the second round of the presidential elections. Millions of people took to the streets to demonstrate against this fraudulent election. The ICFI and the World Socialist Web Site sent an open letter to LO, the LCR (Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire, now the New Anti-Capitalist Party) and the Workers’ Party (Parti des travailleurs — PT). These parties had collectively received over 3 million votes.

In its letter, the ICFI proposed that they join forces in a campaign to boycott the 2002 Le Pen-Chirac presidential elections. The WSWS open letter called for workers and young people to reject the electoral fraud that offered them only two reactionary defenders of capitalism and to use the boycott as a way of preparing for the struggle against whichever of the two would win the election. This would position the working class as an independent force not only

from Chirac, but also from the PS and the PCF.

LO, the LCR, and the PT refused to fight for a workers’ boycott of the 2002 elections. They aligned themselves behind the official campaign for a Chirac vote. LO dithered, while LCR presidential candidate Olivier Besancenot said he would vote for Chirac.

After the publication of the ICFI’s open letter, LO finally took the position of calling on voters to go to the polls to vote blank. But LO refused to conduct a public campaign to boycott the election and educate workers and young people on these critical issues. LO was clearly concerned that this would undermine the funding of its positions in the trade union bureaucracy by the state and employers, and also its links with the PS.

LO abdicated its political responsibilities and retreated, claiming that the decision to vote was a purely individual choice. Arlette Laguiller, LO’s candidate at the time, said, “Of course, each person must make the choice that seems most justified, but each person must think about what this choice could entail for the future.”

Twenty years after LO aligned itself with the Chirac vote and left the neo-fascists in a position to present themselves as the only “anti-system” force, the bourgeois order is moving to the far right. The banks are plundering workers across Europe, the imperialist powers are waging war on Russia in the Ukraine and the ruling class’ malign neglect on COVID-19 has killed 1.8 million people in Europe. The presence of Le Pen and Macron in the second round testifies to the fact that the capitalist system has nothing to offer workers.

There is a deep anger developing among workers and young people, but for it to become a powerful political force there needs to be a rebellion against petty-bourgeois parties like LO. The PES proposes to reject calls for a purely individual reaction to the crisis of French democracy. The defence of democratic rights and opposition to war requires the collective, independent mobilisation of the working class against capitalism, on a socialist and internationalist perspective.

The PES is fighting for this perspective and calls on workers and youth to fight for an active boycott of the election, and to help build the PES as the new socialist and internationalist party of the working class.



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