

Political lessons of the 2022 French presidential elections

Parti de l'égalité socialiste (France)
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The re-election of unpopular French President Emmanuel Macron against neo-fascist candidate Marine Le Pen has resolved none of the political issues posed to workers and youth in the election. It will not stop the growing danger of far-right dictatorship; nor will it halt the movement of the working class to the left and into struggle.

As an indication of the anti-democratic evolution of French capitalism, the 42 percent vote for Le Pen carries far more weight than the “liberal” label applied by the media to Macron. Le Pen won the largest vote for the far right in French history, up nearly 9 percent from her 2017 vote against Macron in the previous 2017 elections. If she increased her share of the vote as much over Macron’s second term as she did over his first term, she would be elected in 2027.

Above all, Macron bases himself in the final analysis on the same far-right forces in the banks and the police-military forces as Le Pen. Macron, the first French president to publicly endorse Nazi-collaborationist dictator Philippe Pétain as he sent riot police to attack “yellow vest” protests, named Gérald Darmanin, a sympathizer of the far-right *Action française*, as his interior minister to implement his anti-Muslim “anti-separatist law.”

As he pursues the draconian austerity agenda he is laying out for his second term, Macron will seek to further incite far-right forces and nationalism. He aims to raise the retirement age three years to 65, force welfare recipients to work for benefits, raise university tuition and slash unemployment insurance. Newspapers are reporting that the riot police are preparing for a violent confrontation on Sunday with May Day protests; the police prefects are reading the original version of the directives for a violent assault on the workers straight from the Elysée presidential palace.

This vindicates the call launched by the Parti de l'égalité socialiste (PES), the French section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), for an active boycott of the runoff. The PES explained that only an irreconcilable rejection of both Macron and Le Pen,

mobilizing workers and youth against a fraudulent election between two far-right candidates, would prepare the working class for the struggles against the next president, be it Macron or Le Pen. Macron is now preparing to launch the assault against the working class.

To tens of millions of voters who hate both Macron and Le Pen, the PES proposed an active policy and a way forward speaking to widely held sentiments among workers. Significantly, over 3 million voters went to the polling stations on April 24 to cast blank or spoiled ballots.

Deep social anger is mounting in the working class, flowing from a crisis of the capitalist system that is international in scope. Social austerity and the devastating global surge in inflation, the fascistic turn in official politics, the unchecked ravages of COVID-19, and now the growing fear of nuclear war amid NATO’s intervention against Russia in Ukraine are pushing workers to the left. The key issue is how to unify workers in France with their class brothers and sisters internationally against the class forces represented in France by both Macron and Le Pen.

In the first round of the presidential elections on April 10, 22 percent of voters tried to register left-wing opposition to the political establishment by voting for Jean-Luc Mélenchon. Coming just behind Le Pen’s 23 percent vote, Mélenchon was eliminated from the runoff. However, it was apparent that his vote, concentrated among youth and low-paid workers, and having carried working class districts of the big cities, objectively placed Mélenchon and his party, Unsubmissive France (LFI), in a very powerful position.

As protests broke out in universities and high schools across France against the Macron-Le Pen runoff, the PES laid out a left-wing policy. Mélenchon could have appealed to his voters to protest and go on strike against the Macron-Le Pen runoff, the police crackdown Macron launched against youth protests, and the imminent danger of war. With the LFI carrying working class districts of the big cities, such strikes could have not only shut down France’s economy, but rallied workers internationally against inflation and war.

Mélenchon reacted instead by trying not to mobilize but to demobilize the workers. Shocked by his strong support, which had surged just over the last two weeks, Mélenchon said on the evening of the first round that he would never run for president again; tacitly backing Macron, he chanted that not one LFI vote should go for Le Pen. A few days later, he reversed himself, calling for an LFI vote in the June legislative elections so he could serve as prime minister under either Macron or Le Pen. He claimed he would fight for progressive policies against the president.

The PES categorically rejects the political lie that workers can try to implement a progressive agenda under a neo-fascist government. Mélenchon's proposal to implement a progressive agenda of "people's revolution" under either Macron or Le Pen flies in the face of Marxism and of fundamental lessons of the history of the 20th century.

The corrupt institutions of France's Fifth Republic, which Mélenchon has previously claimed to oppose, give the president exclusive power over foreign policy. But one cannot defend the workers on the national soil while acquiescing to reactionary policies internationally. The defense of workers' lives and livelihoods depends on stopping the massive bank bailouts of the super-rich, the tacit official acceptance of mass infection with COVID-19, and the drive to war against Russia that are pursued internationally by all the imperialist powers.

A struggle for socialist revolution, expropriating the financial aristocracy, is the only way to unite workers in France with their class brothers and sisters internationally against these policies.

The PES rejects Mélenchon's substitution of a nationalist program of "people's revolution" for the struggle of the international working class for socialism. This is an attempt to mobilize against the movement of the working class today the reactionary political legacy of Stalinism and its political allies in the French working class. It leads today towards an accommodation not only to Macron but also to the chauvinist social demagoguery of Le Pen.

Against Mélenchon's flirtation with far-right representatives of French capital, one is compelled to cite Trotsky's urgent warnings against Stalinist forces in the German Communist Party led by Ernst Thälmann, in the years before the coming to power of the Nazi regime:

It is difficult for one to imagine a more shameful capitulation in principle than the fact that the Stalinist bureaucracy has substituted for the slogan of the proletarian revolution the slogan of the people's revolution. ... It is understood that every great revolution is a people's or a national revolution, in

the sense that it unites around the revolutionary class all the virile and creative forces of the nation and reconstructs the nation around a new core. But this is not a slogan, it is a sociological description of the revolution, which requires, moreover, precise and concrete definition. As a slogan, it is inane charlatanism, market competition with the fascists, paid for at the price of injecting confusion into the minds of the workers. The fascist Strasser says 95 percent of the people are interested in the revolution, consequently it is not a class revolution but a people's revolution. Thälmann sings in chorus.

Against the populist demagoguery of Mélenchon, the PES is fully confident in the revolutionary capacities of the working class in France and internationally. A class gulf separates the workers from candidates such as Mélenchon or Le Pen for whom they vote, most often with mistrust and frustration. The key task in France is clarifying critical political and historical issues involved in winning workers and youth to the struggle for socialism and building the PES as the alternative to Mélenchon and pseudo-left parties like the New Anti-capitalist Party that are allying with him.

On this basis, the PES points to the significance of the ICFI's international online celebration of May Day 2022. Speakers from countries around the world will discuss the foundations of the Trotskyist movement's struggle against imperialist war and its root cause, the capitalist system. The PES appeals to workers and youth in France and internationally to attend.



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