

May Day 2022: Lessons of the French election between Macron and Le Pen

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6 May 2022

This is the report delivered by Alex Lantier to the 2022 International May Day Online Rally held on May 1. Lantier is the national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party in France. To view all speeches, visit wsws.org/mayday.

Dear comrades and friends,

I bring the fraternal greetings of the Socialist Equality Party of France to this international celebration of labour.

In France, as elsewhere, May Day celebrations take place in the shadow of the imperialist war waged by the NATO powers against Russia in Ukraine.

A class gulf separates the attitude of workers toward the war from that of the ruling class in France. There is no support for the reactionary invasion of Ukraine launched by the capitalist regime of Russian President Vladimir Putin. But the brutal NATO offensive against Russia, and the threat of a nuclear escalation, worry the vast majority of the French population.

Stopping the NATO drive toward war will require the international mobilisation of the working class, in a renewed struggle for socialism.

The recent French presidential elections, held on April 24, showed that the fight against war cannot take place via the ballot box. Both candidates in the second round, the incumbent “liberal” Emmanuel Macron and the neo-fascist Marine Le Pen, sought to avoid any reference to the danger of a world war.

Le Pen sought to have everyone forget her hostility toward Islam and her support for Donald Trump by displaying sympathy toward Moscow. She hailed the discussions between Macron and Putin, and presented them as initiatives for peace. What a lie!

Macron has done no better than she. He acknowledged the enormous role played by Russia, and

by the entire Soviet Union, in the defeat of the Nazi armies and the liberation of Europe from the Nazi yolk during World War II. Pretending that an enlightened Europe had learned from history, Macron invoked, against the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the memory of the Nazi massacre at Oradour-sur-Glane in France, during the liberation.

But in reality, NATO does not want to free, but to subjugate the workers. Macron is aligned completely with Washington and NATO, who openly state their aim is to “break the back” of Russia. Biden told the business roundtable of the US employer association that the Pentagon brass predict 45 million-60 million deaths in wars to decide who will lead a “new world order.”

French imperialism hopes for its share of the bounty from a new re-division of the world. Paris is therefore delivering arms to the Ukrainian army and far-right militia groups who are killing Russian soldiers on behalf of NATO. Under the cover of Macron’s “liberal” imagery, the French capitalist class is following a far-right foreign policy.

What is the emblem of the Azov Battalion, the neo-Nazi militia on the front lines of the war against Russia? It is the Wolfsangel, the symbol of the Nazi SS division “Das Reich,” which, having arrived in France from occupied Ukraine during WWII, committed the very massacre at Oradour.

The Azov Battalion’s choice of symbol, like Macron’s silence, did not come about by chance. The Ukrainian far-right’s model today is Stepan Bandera, the head of the Ukrainian collaboration with the Nazi occupiers in WWII. And in 2018, Macron revealed his own sympathies, while he was sending police to attack “Yellow vest” protesters who were mobilising against his anti-worker policies, by hailing the memory of

French collaborationist dictator Philippe Pétain.

In the presidential elections, the Socialist Equality Party called for workers to fight for an active boycott of the vote. The SEP rejected the argument of the “lesser evil,” which falsely presented Macron as an alternative to the far right. The SEP insisted that only by rejecting a fraudulent choice between two far-right candidates could workers be prepared for the necessary struggle against the next president.

The SEP’s intervention in the election revealed once again the importance of the defence of Trotskyism by the International Committee of the Fourth International. Rejecting the nationalist “theory” of “Socialism in one country” of Stalin, as well as the national manoeuvres of the French Stalinist apparatus, the SEP has put forward a socialist and internationalist line against war and the danger of fascist dictatorship.

In the first round of the presidential elections on April 10, 22 percent of voters sought to express their opposition from the left by voting for Jean-Luc Mélenchon. Finishing just behind the 23 percent of Le Pen, Mélenchon was indeed eliminated from the race. But his vote, concentrated in the youth and the workers’ suburbs of major cities, placed Mélenchon and his party, Unsubmissive France, in a powerful position.

The PES proposed an active policy of struggle for the working class. Mélenchon could have called on his voters to strike and to protest against war and against the second round of Macron-Le Pen. Such a movement in the workers’ districts of major French cities could have not only brought the French economy to a halt, but rallied workers internationally in a fight against war. But Mélenchon reacted by demobilising his own supporters. He called for an Unsubmissive France vote in the June legislative elections, promising to serve as prime minister, whether under a President Macron or President Le Pen.

This was a sign that the Stalinist and Social-Democratic milieu based around the leadership of Unsubmissive France could very well accommodate itself to a neo-fascist regime in France, which would wage war against Russia.

Indeed, before the presidential elections, all the petty-bourgeois apparatuses that during the 20th century dominated the left and the workers movement in France, by putting forward their friendship with the

Stalinist bureaucracy, had all turned against Russia. The Stalinist union apparatus, the General Federation of Labour; the Pabloite New Anti-capitalist Party; as well as Mélenchon himself expressed their sympathy towards NATO against Russia in Ukraine.

Mélenchon’s declaration that he would serve as prime minister under whoever may be the president of France, like the alignment of the old pro-Stalinist apparatuses with NATO against Russia, all of this constitutes a warning. The middle-class political descendants of the Stalinist opponents of Trotskyism are moving sharply toward the right.

The SEP, however, has full confidence in the revolutionary capacities of the French and international working class. A class gulf separates workers from the diverse political formations of the pseudo-left. The working class, armed with a political perspective and the traditions of the Russian Revolution of October 1917, will be able to fight and achieve victory against capitalism and war, and thus construct a new socialist order.



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