

French police crack down on May Day rallies

Our reporters
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On Sunday, a week after the final round of the French presidential elections and the re-election of Emmanuel Macron, May Day marches took place across the country. Macron, the “president of the rich,” elected again by default, as in 2017, with millions voting for him only to keep neo-fascist candidate Marine Le Pen from being elected, sent large detachments of riot police to threaten and violently assault protesters.

It was an unmistakable signal that Macron’s election night promises to turn to a “new method” and begin to listen to the people are a complete fraud. Pouring billions into the army amid the reckless NATO military escalation targeting Russia, he plans to cut pensions, make welfare recipients work for benefits, slash unemployment insurance and raise university tuition—all the while eliminating all health care measures against COVID-19. Workers broadly sense that a bitter confrontation between Macron and the working class is being prepared.

Thousands marched in cities across the country, with 16,000 marching in Marseille, and thousands marching in Lyon, Lille, Strasbourg, Toulouse, Bordeaux, Nantes and Rennes. There were violent clashes between protesters and security forces, in particular, in Nantes and Rennes, where police fired multiple stun grenades at protesters. Overall, hundreds of thousands of people marched, with the Interior Ministry claiming 106,000 people had attended protests.

Tens of thousands marched in Paris, many brandishing signs criticizing Macron and the danger of fascism. The protest march was repeatedly attacked by police and ultimately kettled on Nation Square as police allowed protesters to take the subway to leave. Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin, a sympathizer of the far-right *Action française* group, reported that his riot police had arrested 45 people at the protest and blamed “unacceptable violence” on protesters.

In reality, police as usual violently assaulted

protesters. One widely viewed Tweet showed footage of riot police assaulting a defenseless young woman and fracturing her skull, while another woman standing next to her screamed: “She’s not doing anything!”

WSWS reporters intervened at the Paris protest and discussed with workers the call launched by the Parti de l’égalité socialiste (PES; Socialist Equality Party, France), the French section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, for a boycott of the Macron-Le Pen second round and the mobilization of the working class in an independent political movement against both Macron and Le Pen.

Many marchers in Paris had voted for Jean-Luc Mélenchon, of the Unsubmissive France (LFI) party, in the first round of the election, hoping to obtain a more left-wing policy. While Mélenchon carried the youth vote and the working class districts of major cities, he did not make any broader appeal to his voters to mobilize on May Day. Though he had 22 percent, or nearly 8 million voters, he is seeking electoral alliances with the discredited big business Socialist Party (PS) and stressing that he would be willing to work under Macron as prime minister.

WSWS reporters spoke with Georges, a Mélenchon voter who said that despite some doubts, he still hoped Mélenchon would impel progressive change. “He could lead us into a brick wall, I don’t disagree with you there. But the difference between him and the other parties, with Macron, is enormous,” Georges said.

As WSWs reporters noted that Mélenchon is a former PS senator and minister with close ties to the union bureaucracy, Georges replied that he thought Mélenchon was in fact trying to channel social anger against Macron, but that workers could hopefully overcome that obstacle. “Even he can be overwhelmed, because there is enormous anger. He is trying to push that into the usual channels, but it will not necessarily work. There are other possibilities, another, deeper

change is needed. In any case, the liberation of the workers is the task of the workers themselves.”

WSWS reporters also spoke to Romain, who said: “I was not in agreement with all Mélenchon’s ideas, but I thought it would be an opportunity for the left to make it to the second round. I voted Macron on the second round. I’m not sure; I may regret it. I was not satisfied, anyway.” Romain said that Mélenchon “is to the left of the policy of the Socialist Party and of the French Communist Party, who as I see it do not represent communist ideas that they should defend.”

Romain said he generally agreed with the PES’s call for a boycott and pointed to the obstacles facing a revolutionary movement in the working class. He noted that parties that the media promotes as “left”—like LFI, the Stalinist PCF, or the Pabloite New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA)—had refused to support the overwhelmingly popular “yellow vest” protests against social inequality that broke out against Macron in 2018.

Romain said, “During the ‘yellow vest’ movement, from the beginning, the media machine tried to discredit the movement. Even the left-wing parties, they did not take up the movement enthusiastically due to electoral calculations, they didn’t think it would be popular. There, they should have said that they are on the side of the social movement, on the side of the workers, of people who struggle to get to the end of the month.”

The WSWS also spoke to Christophe, a postman and “yellow vest” protester who had just left the Stalinist-linked General Confederation of Labor (CGT) union. Explaining that he had voted for Mélenchon, he said: “Macron and Le Pen can both go to hell.”

Christophe added that he was worried about the NATO war drive against Russia and did not believe the claims of the French government or its NATO allies to be defending democracy or Ukraine against Russia. He said that the NATO powers “are the biggest pirates in the world. If they are doing anything, it is for money and power.”

Mélenchon was at the Paris march and met PS Party Secretary Olivier Faure for a symbolic handshake as LFI and the PS negotiate a common position in the June legislative elections. “We are only a few millimeters away from a deal between all of us,” Mélenchon said, stressing that LFI had guaranteed all its negotiating partners—including the PS, the PCF and

the Greens—that “they would get a parliamentary group in the National Assembly.”

Mélenchon is working desperately to keep these discredited pro-capitalist parties on life support. The Greens and the PCF had less than 5 percent, and the PS had less than 2 percent, in the presidential elections, and all face a complete wipe-out in the legislative elections. Mélenchon’s response is not to seek to build a movement in the working class to bring down Macron, but to try to get enough seats in the National Assembly so that all of these parties can continue receiving the parliamentary group subsidies that are critical to financing their operations.

The PES’s call for workers to boycott the Macron-Le Pen presidential election is aimed at steeling workers for the struggles to come, by rejecting and irreconcilably opposing both candidates. The election of Macron and his pursuit of an extreme-right program vindicates the position of the PES. Opposition in the working class to Macron’s policies of war, mass infection with COVID-19 and draconian social austerity cannot be tied to the electoral maneuvers of Mélenchon, his political satellites or to the PS—which in power pursued an agenda virtually identical to that of Macron.

The decisive issue facing workers and youth is organizing action committees, independent of the nationally based union bureaucracies, to prepare opposition to Macron’s policies and link it to the developing movement against war and austerity among workers internationally; and building the PES as the Trotskyist alternative to the pseudo-left parties of the affluent middle class such as LFI.



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