Mélenchon surges in polls in run-up to French legislative elections

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The first round of the French legislative elections will take place tomorrow, seven weeks after the re-election of President Emmanuel Macron. However, Macron's "Ensemble!" election coalition is falling behind the New Popular Ecological and Social Union (NUPES) of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who finished third in the French presidential elections with 22 percent of the vote.

On Thursday, several polls were published showing NUPES candidates leading in absolute numbers of votes with 28 percent of the total, in front of "Ensemble!" with 27 percent. Marine Le Pen's neo-fascist National Rally (RN) polled 19.5 percent, and the right-wing The Republicans (LR) 11 percent.

There is enormous uncertainty about the outcome of the election. As Mélenchon's vote is concentrated in urban working class areas, Macron's coalition would likely get the most seats, by carrying the many smaller rural districts. In the 577-seat National Assembly, "Ensemble!" would have 260 to 300 seats, NUPES 175 to 215, LR 35 to 55, and the RN 20 to 60. Macron could thus fail to get the 289-seat majority needed to form a government, though Mélenchon's promise to win the election and become prime minister under Macron also appears vulnerable.

The surge in votes for Mélenchon—who has won support by pledging to bring the retirement age back down to 60, block gas price increases and increase pensions and the minimum wage—reflects an attempt by workers and youth to register a left-wing vote. It has exploded the capitalist media's explanation for the two-decade rise of neo-fascist parties: namely, that French workers are shifting relentlessly to the right.

In fact, workers are looking to register a left-wing vote and avert the devastating impact of inflation in fuel and food prices that is rampaging across the world capitalist economy. Neo-fascists have lost 4 percent of the vote since the presidential election, amid an international upsurge of the class struggle. During the legislative election campaign, health and airport workers across France and Europe struck against low wages, social austerity and the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic.

At the same time, however, the *Parti de l'égalité socialiste* (PES), the French section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), stresses that workers can place no confidence in Mélenchon, who will inevitably disappoint whatever hopes they place in him. Mélenchon aims to drive workers into a parliamentary dead end of supporting a Mélenchon-Macron coalition government, to defuse the mounting radicalization of the working class and to avert an explosion of the class struggle.

Yesterday, Mélenchon issued a last-minute election appeal, saying: "A great time has come. Sunday, if you want, if you go vote … if you vote NUPES, we can change the history of our country and, above all, the lives of each and every one of us." With enough NUPES votes, he added, "we will have a majority of deputies in the National Assembly, and from there, a government of which I will be the prime minister. So it's the time to make a simple effort … it just takes a few moments, and it can change everything."

It is a fraud to claim that electing Mélenchon to serve under Macron as prime minister will "change everything." Macron is widely hated among workers as the "president of the rich," for having cracked down in his first term on all protests and strikes against austerity and military-police repression. There is nothing to negotiate with Macron. He can only be dealt with by waging the class struggle, and mobilizing the working class to bring down his regime.

With Macron in control of foreign policy as president, France is stoking the NATO war against Russia in Ukraine. He has said he is ready to send French warships into the Black Sea to face off against the Russian

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navy—ostensibly to remove mines Ukraine has sowed in its harbors to protect them from Russian attack, and then escort Ukrainian grain exports out to world markets. Macron is spending countless millions of euros on sending heavy artillery and missile systems to the Ukrainian armed forces, risking the outbreak of World War III.

Macron is continuing the multitrillion-euro European bank bailouts of the super-rich that are fueling inflation and his policy of mass infection on COVID-19. He also is maintaining his usual deafening silence on the forces in the French officer corps around the far-right de Villiers family, who last year threatened to mount a coup in France, shortly after Donald Trump attempted a coup in Washington D.C. to stop the election of Joe Biden.

Despite Macron's flagrantly reactionary program, Mélenchon is signaling that he will seek a deal with Macron at all costs, supposedly in the national interest.

He defended Macron's utterly reckless war policy in Ukraine against criticisms by Ukrainian officials who demanded that Macron visit their country. Endorsing the European powers' arming of neo-Nazi forces like Ukraine's Azov Battalion, Mélenchon said: "I think the Ukrainians should not speak to us that way, because France is arming, France is engaging, France is supporting the Ukrainian people."

On France Inter radio, Mélenchon pledged that with Macron, "[w]e will get along because that is in the interest of our country." He also walked back his earlier claims to want to build a Sixth Republic to replace the current Fifth Republic founded in 1958 by General Charles de Gaulle during the Algerian war, amid a coup by officers hostile to Algerian independence from France.

While Mélenchon claimed on France Inter that he "fights the constitution of the Fifth Republic," he hastened to add that "as long as it's that one, that is the rule that will be applied." Asked to explain why he suddenly proposed to support and respect a constitution he has so often loudly denounced, Mélenchon bluntly declared: "I am not in favor of organizing a political insurrection in this country."

He is doing a cynical and reactionary balancing act—pledging to massively improve living standards, while supporting the policies of France's "president of the rich," and claiming to speak for left-wing sentiment and opposition to capitalism, while opposing revolution. There is, however, no way to square the circle or to reconcile the irreconcilable.

Mélenchon's pledge to work with Macron no doubt reflects his acute awareness that, should it do well in the elections, NUPES legislators would necessarily be called upon to help implement Macron's program.

The working class in Europe and beyond have had bitter experiences with pseudo-left parties like the NUPES, that have pledged to "change everything" but oppose revolution. Mélenchon's ally in Greece, the Syriza ("Coalition of the Radical Left") party became a byword for betrayal after it came to power in 2015, pledging to end EU austerity policies. It promptly abandoned its promises, imposed billions of euros in social cuts and built a vast network of prison camps for refugees in the Greek islands.

In Spain, Mélenchon's ally, the Podemos party, which is currently in government, has sent riot police to assault striking metalworkers and truckers, imposed austerity policies and sent anti-tank missiles to the neo-Nazi Azov Battalion in Ukraine.

The maneuvers of the pseudo-left cannot and will not avert the mounting radicalization of the working class and the upsurge of the class struggle. As Europe teeters on the edge of world war and rising prices ruin workers internationally, capitalism is beset by fatal inner contradictions, and in France a confrontation is brewing between Macron and the working class. The question facing workers is not to choose Macron's prime minister but to prepare for revolutionary struggle.

The PES is the Trotskyist alternative to the pseudo-left forces in and around the NUPES that are making their peace with Macron. It insists that workers struggles must be taken out of the hands of corrupt union bureaucracies affiliated to the NUPES and led by rank-and-file committees set up by the workers themselves. The building of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), armed with the Trotskyist perspective, can allow workers to settle accounts with Macron and European capitalism and build the United Socialist States of Europe.

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