

Mélenchon vote rises in first round of French legislative elections

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The first round of the French legislative elections led to a large advance by Jean-Luc Mélenchon's New Popular Ecological and Social Union (NUPES) and a humiliating setback for President Emmanuel Macron's "Ensemble" coalition. The second and final round will take place on Sunday, June 19.

The election was also marked by record abstention in a first round of a French legislative election. It was 51.5 percent, according to Ifop-Fiducial estimates, narrowly beating the previous record of 51.3 percent set in 2017.

As of late last night, the NUPES and Ensemble were neck-and-neck with 25.6 percent of the vote. Marine Le Pen's neo-fascist National Rally (NR) had 18.7 percent and the right-wing The Republicans (LR) 11.3 percent. Reconquest, the party launched by neo-fascist ideologue Eric Zemmour and massively promoted by the capitalist media before the April 2022 presidential elections, fell to 4.25 percent.

It appears likely that no party will emerge from next week's second round with the necessary majority of the National Assembly's 577 seats. According to various media estimates, Ensemble would obtain 255 to 295 seats, the NUPES 150 to 210, LR 50 to 80, and the RN 20 to 45. Ensemble would get more parliamentary seats with fewer votes by winning many smaller rural constituencies, while NUPES votes are concentrated in smaller numbers of large, big-city districts.

The NUPES benefited from concern over inflation and rising left-wing sentiment among workers and youth. Against inflation, Mélenchon issued many pledges, like freezing natural gas prices and bringing the retirement age back down to 60. Mass support for such policies refutes the arguments given by the official media in recent years to explain the rise of neo-fascist parties, claiming that workers are irresistibly turning to the far right.

Last week, airport and health workers in France and across Europe struck against low wages, austerity and the

murderous official handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. Further strikes are planned in workplaces across Europe in coming weeks, including possibly a historic strike of rail workers in Great Britain.

Yesterday evening, Mélenchon declared that Macron's movement was "beaten and undone," calling on the French people to "overflow" the voting booths next Sunday to elect the NUPES in power and him prime minister.

He declared, "The truth is that the presidential party, after the first round, is beaten and undone. For the first time in the Fifth Republic, a newly-elected president cannot obtain a majority in the following legislative election. I call on our people, given this result, and the extraordinary opportunity it offers to our personal lives and the fate of our common fatherland, to overflow the voting booths next Sunday."

While current projections show that Mélenchon would not get a majority in the Assembly, Macron's majority is well and truly under threat. Barely seven weeks since Macron's re-election, by default against neo-fascist candidate Marine Le Pen, it is apparent that the president does not have significant electoral support. In fact, the "president of the rich," who is preparing €80 billion in social austerity cuts and plunging weapons into NATO's war on Russia in Ukraine, is widely despised.

Many "Ensemble!" candidates were either beaten or forced into second round races in their constituencies. The current government led by Elisabeth Borne, whom Macron installed shortly after winning the presidential elections, is facing a deep crisis given the unpopularity of its ministers.

The prime minister herself was forced into a second round contest with NUPES candidate Noé Gauchard in Normandy's 6th constituency in Calvados.

Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin, a sympathizer of the fascistic *Action française* movement who drafted an "anti-

separatist” law targeting Islam, was forced into a second round in the 10th constituency in the North.

Ecological Transition Minister Amélie de Montchalin is facing a likely loss in the 6th constituency of the Essonne, against a NUPES candidate, Jérôme Guedj of the big-business Socialist Party (PS).

Former Education Minister Jean-Michel Blanquer was eliminated on the first round. He was widely hated for helping impose a decade-long wage freeze on teachers, and for rejecting the use of scientific health measures to struggle against transmission of COVID-19 in the schools, despite demands from parents and teachers. With 18.9 percent of total votes cast, he failed to obtain the votes of over 12.5 percent of the total number of registered voters in his constituency that is needed to advance to the second round.

The fact that many ministers or leading politicians were eliminated or forced into second-round run-offs by unknown candidates underscores the broader lack of legitimacy of the political regime, and the artificial character of the established parties. None of them has a genuine base of support among broader masses of voters.

This is also the case for the neo-fascist parties. RN presidential candidate Marine Le Pen was forced into a second-round runoff at Hénin-Beaumont by NUPES candidate Marine Tondelier. Eric Zemmour, the former far-right presidential candidate who polled at near 20 percent of the vote in the early stages of the presidential elections, was eliminated in the Var region on the first round.

Such setbacks for government ministers and neo-fascists with enormous media backing point to deep opposition emerging among workers to the diktat of the ruling class. As in the presidential elections, this development is initially taking the form of a growing vote for Mélenchon, which workers are using to signal their anger with Macron.

Neither Macron nor the far right can be fought, however, by electing NUPES or other deputies to the Assembly, in the hope that Mélenchon can then serve as prime minister under Macron.

Underlying the rising class struggle and growing opposition to Macron is an international crisis of capitalism which cannot be resolved inside France’s borders. There is deep social anger against the global surge of inflation driven by decades of state handouts of bailout cash to the super-rich, by the COVID-19 pandemic, and by the NATO war on Russia in Ukraine. By offering to serve as prime minister under Macron, who

controls foreign policy, Mélenchon has made clear he does not oppose Macron’s EU bank bailouts, policies of mass COVID-19 infection, or support for war. Nor does Mélenchon support mobilizing the working class against these policies.

While Mélenchon won nearly 8 million votes in the presidential elections, concentrated in working class areas of France’s largest cities, he has not called for strikes or protests against Macron that could shut down the French economy. Before the legislative elections, he even declared his explicit opposition to a revolutionary policy, stating: “I am not in favor of organizing a political insurrection in this country.”

Instead, he formed the NUPES alliance with the big-business PS and the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF). Even as the NUPES wins millions of votes, however, the weaknesses and contradictions of its strategy are coming to the fore.

The record abstention in yesterday’s election underscores that broad layers of workers view Mélenchon’s outreach to the PS and PCF, which have decades of experience in imposing austerity on the working class, with distrust and disillusionment. Significantly, despite the NUPES score, the RN is also poised to make a breakthrough and gain a number of seats in the Assembly on June 19.

A surge of opposition in the working class is underway, however, and even broader explosions of the class struggle are being prepared. As the Parti de l’égalité socialiste (PES) explained during the runoff of the presidential elections, calling for an active campaign to mobilize the working class to boycott the election between Macron and Le Pen, the way forward is to reject Macron, Le Pen, and the entire capitalist political establishment.

The problems driving the working class into struggle in France and internationally can be solved only by politically mobilizing the working class in a movement rejecting Mélenchon’s nationalism and his orientation to the capitalist state, and fighting for the transfer of state power to the workers.



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