

France's hung parliament, rising class struggles stagger Macron

Alex Lantier
23 June 2022

Last night, President Emmanuel Macron addressed the French people for the first time since the debacle that his “Together” coalition suffered in Sunday’s legislative elections. The result was a perfunctory, 10-minute address that outlined no concrete policies but made clear that the election has led to a historic crisis of rule in France.

Claiming that “on April 24, you renewed your confidence in me by electing me president of the Republic,” Macron said, “No political force can today make laws by itself. Indeed, the presidential party now holds a plurality in parliament. ... To act in your interests and those of the nation, we must collectively learn to govern and write laws differently.”

Macron was silent on his plans to raise the retirement age by three years to 65, make welfare recipients work for benefits, massively raise university tuition and spend billions of euros on building up the army for war with Russia. Instead, he called to “clarify in the coming days how much responsibility and cooperation different groups in the National Assembly are willing to take on. ... Enter into a coalition for government and action? Just agreeing to vote certain texts, our budget, which ones? It is now up to political groups to say very transparently how far they will go.”

Macron is setting a course for a confrontation with the working class, which not only in France but across Europe and internationally is rebelling against the policies he aims to impose. Thrusting aside the results of the elections—in which the New Popular Ecological and Social Union (NUPES) led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon won the most votes, beating out his “Ensemble” group—Macron is proclaiming that he will impose his agenda, running roughshod over working class opposition.

Before Macron’s speech, former Health Minister Olivier Véran, who is now tasked with relations with the parliament, said he was consider including the right-wing

The Republicans (LR), the Greens, the big business Socialist Party (PS) or the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF) in a governmental alliance with the deputies currently supporting Macron. Véran said: “What is on the table is identifying a majority to advance, reform and transform our country.”

Prior to Macron’s speech, moreover, PCF General Secretary Fabien Roussel indicated that he was considering the possibility of joining a national unity government under Macron. Roussel said, however, that it would be hard for the PCF to join a national unity government at the current time, given Macron’s deep unpopularity.

Unexpectedly, however, Macron did not clearly state in his remarks whether he would try to form a government of national unity or simply move ahead with a minority government. His remarks ended in a peculiar ultimatum to the leaders of other parliamentary parties to adopt his reactionary program as their own.

“Most of the leaders I spoke to have ruled out the possibility of a government of national unity. This is a hypothesis that, moreover, from my standpoint is not currently justified. ... I think thus that it is possible in this crucial moment we are living, to find a larger, clearer majority to act,” he said, adding, “I hope that in the coming weeks, this political process will continue with clarity and responsibility.”

In reality, less than two months after his re-election on April 24, Macron’s administration is teetering on the brink of collapse. This is not, however, principally due to the fact that the legislative elections ultimately produced a hung parliament. Indeed, factoring in LR, PS and Green deputies, there is an open consensus among a majority in the National Assembly for a program of rapid and aggressive austerity attacks against the working class and military build-up against Russia.

Indeed, NUPES leader Mélenchon last week publicly

declared his support for Macron's trip to Kiev to escalate European arms delivery to the far-right nationalist regime in Ukraine for the war against Russia.

The parliamentary parties are not willing to turn these endorsements of Macron's agenda into active participation in his government, however, under conditions of an explosive growth of the class struggle not only in France, but across Europe and internationally.

Across the English Channel, British rail workers are launching a strike action aiming to reverse decades of social attacks on the working class and police-military build-up since the defeat of the 1985 miners strike. This is, however, only the most explosive conflict of an entire series of struggles that are breaking out across the European continent against the impoverishment of workers by inflation and the ever more aggressive military policy targeting Russia.

Belgian transport workers were on strike on Monday, protesting low wages and NATO aggression against Russia, and French truckers will go out next week to protest rising fuel prices. Health care and airport workers across Europe and in France will be going on strike in the coming weeks to demand higher wages and better working conditions amid the continuing fall-out of the official mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The struggles of the working class, to be victorious, must be taken out of the hands of national union bureaucracies tied to organizations like the NUPES in France, and waged as a political struggle against the governments of the European Union (EU). The Macron administration and the entire EU will wage a ruthless struggle against workers' wage demands and opposition to war, which they view as intolerable. Against this, the decisive question is the conscious international unification of the working class in a struggle for socialism.

This fight against inflation, the pandemic and imperialist war can only proceed via a struggle that seeks to bring down the Macron government and its EU allies, and transfer power to the working class. The drawing in of ever broader layers of workers into struggle will bring them into headlong conflict with organizations such as the PCF or the NUPES, which—though the capitalist media falsely presents them as “left”—are seeking a compromise with Macron.

Macron is grooming the entire NUPES alliance as potential supporters for his administration against the workers. This includes not only Roussel's PCF but also the Unsubmissive France (LFI) party directly led by Mélenchon.

While LFI presents itself as a more intransigent opposition to Macron, it is also signaling that it is seeking a deal with Macron. Top LFI official Adrien Quatennens visited Macron in the Elysée Palace for talks and afterwards said: “We are not candidates for any arrangement, any combination, any participation in a government with the president of the Republic because our political diagnosis is that we need a government that will do the opposite of what his government is doing. I told him that it would be totally incoherent and improbable for us to participate in this type of coalition.”

At the same time, Quatennens said, “We have never been an opposition on principle,” adding that LFI hoped that it would be possible for the majority of the National Assembly to vote a “great law dealing with the social emergency situation” during Macron's term. He also boasted that Macron had personally told him that he believes LFI is a party compatible with the existing French republic. That is, Macron and LFI know they are united against the danger of revolution.

The nearly 8 million votes for Mélenchon in the April presidential elections and the vote of over one-quarter of the electorate for the NUPES reflect support not for LFI's maneuvers with Macron but for a determined political struggle against Macron. As the class struggle intensifies, this support will only grow and draw ever broader layers of workers into struggle.

In the French presidential elections, the Parti de l'égalité socialiste (PES) rejected claims that Macron would be a “democratic” alternative to his opponent in the second round, the neo-fascist Marine Le Pen. It unambiguously called for a boycott of the election to build a movement in the working class against whichever candidate won. The upsurge in the class struggle against Macron has vindicated this perspective. It is the Trotskyist alternative that must be built to oppose the NUPES and its political satellites that are seeking to work out a deal with Macron.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact