



Macron wins: class collaboration is no way to stop his new offensive

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The second round of France's presidential election on 24 April saw Emmanuel Macron, an arrogant neoliberal 'reformer', returned to the Elysée for a second term. He beat veteran racist populist Marine Le Pen by 58.55% to 41.45%, a larger margin than many had expected.

However, more than one in three voters failed to vote for either candidate. Turnout was just under 72%, the lowest in a second round since 1969. It seems more than three million people spoiled their ballot or cast blank votes.

Nevertheless, Le Pen did win more than 13 million votes, a record for National Rally, formerly the National Front. The RN is certainly a foul reactionary force, one that would enact measures to discriminate France's citizens of colonial origin and harass the youth of the banlieues, but it is not a fascist movement.

Indeed, Le Pen's advance was due in part to her 'de-demonisation', achieved by emphasising social issues like the rising cost of living for ordinary people and abandoning issues like anti-abortion and a 'Frexit' from the EU. She somewhat softened her virulent Islamophobia too, 'generously' admitting that Muslims can be French, but maintaining her call for a ban on wearing the hijab in public and for a referendum on harsher immigration controls.

Part of the reason for the record abstention is the fact that Macron has electorally marginalised both traditional parties of the left and the right. Thus, François Mitterrand's Socialist Party and the Communist Party were reduced to single figures in the first round and on the right the Gaullists too achieved paltry results. Macron's own party, La République En Marche, is a rootless collection of ambitious office seekers drawn from right and left, well suited to be the basis of a Bonapartist presidency.

The champion of the left is Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who was only narrowly beaten by Le Pen in the first round. He is now presenting himself as having a real prospect of defeating the president's party in the legislative elections on June 12 and 19, and even becoming prime minister, forcing Macron into 'cohabitation'.

Indeed, the high level of abstentions and spoiled ballots reflect not only the fact that Macron is widely detested and that Mélenchon refused to call for a vote for him to stop Le Pen, but also the fact that there was no candidate of the reformist left. A reflection of the widespread alienation was seen after the first round in a series of demonstrations that broke out across France with students from lycées and universities, as well as rail workers, denouncing a choice between 'the plague and cholera'.

Meanwhile, the French left, those who would once have voted for the PS or the Communist PCF are now rallying to Mélenchon's left populist Union Populaire; giving him 22 per cent in the first round, more than 7.7 million votes. Mélenchon urged his voters not on any account to vote for Le Pen but also refused to endorse Macron.

Those who argued for a blank were correct. Neither bourgeois candidate deserved a single vote from the working class, the youth of the lycées and the banlieues. Indeed, the latter are presently victimised far more by Macron's police than by the far right. The idea that Macron is a barrier to the rise of fascism was the usual cynical ploy to panic voters to voting for him as the lesser evil.

The fact the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (NPA) fell for this shows how far it is departing from independent class politics. The fact that it is now also courting a place in Mélenchon's Union Populaire for the legislative elections ? standing on a platform with a potpourri of popular frontist ?Repub- licanism?, could spell death for what, a decade or so ago, once seemed a breakthrough for the far left.

The economic policies and social destruction carried out by Macron, and threatened to continue in his second term, are a major part of what has fuelled the rise of the racist right, Zemmour as well as Le Pen, and will continue to do so. The two biggest union federations, the CFDT and the CGT, having called for a vote for Macron to ?stop fascism? are now offering to engage in a dialogue with him on social issues, including his ?reforms?. We should not expect that any such dialogue will bear fruit for the working class.

In fact, the only force that can take on both a neoliberal anti-democratic president and the strengthened far right is the militant rank and file in the unions in combination with the youth of the universities, the lycées and banlieues, who have always made up the bulk of anti-capitalist, anti-war and anti-racist fighters that have seen off the NF thugs in the past. And they can see them off again, should disappointment with Le Pen and Zemmour's electoral failures generate a real street fighting fascist movement from the lumpenproletariat in conditions of deepening economic crisis.

Meanwhile, the militants in the trade unions and the far left need to put themselves at the head of this resistance from day one of the new presidency, not concentrate on the chimera of Jean-Luc Mélenchon as Macron's prime minister.

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