

Political situation in France after the first round of Presidential elections

First beat Le Pen, then fight Macron

By **Adriano Vodslon** in Paris

The Fifth Republic is on its last legs, and lots of people know this or sense it. The latest illustration of this is how hard the municipal officials organising the second round of the ballot found it to even staff the polling stations.

Repeated scandals and the treachery all governments have shown toward the majority population of employed people and workers have speeded up the Fifth Republic's decay. It was the great movement against the so-called Labour Law which caused the end of this form of bosses' government. Even before the campaign started – a campaign which all the media described as “out of the ordinary” – it was clear there would be a political upheaval. In fact, each in their own way, all four candidates with any hope of reaching the second proclaimed a break with the Fifth Republic. Le Pen wanted to do it by making “the Nation” a constitutional priority and instituting State racism towards immigrants; Macron through ruling by decree backed by a parliamentary majority drawn from the Republicans (the rump of the former Gaullist party) the remnants of the Socialist Party (wiped out in this campaign) or from businesspeople, designed to rubber-stamp his plans to break up social provision and pass laws favourable to the bourgeoisie; Fillon for his part

was weighed down by his corrupt past and more and more relied upon the more radical wing of Republicans, quite prepared to destroy their party in order to save his candidacy and get a shot at destroying workers' legal rights; and finally Mélenchon had already spent several years calling for a Constituent Assembly to found a Sixth Republic, while carefully avoiding saying which class should prevail therein.

In short, before 23 April the choice was between moving towards a Republic more and more openly in the hands of the bosses, a pro-bourgeois and anti-immigrant republic, or towards a Republic whose stated objective would be to defend the oppressed. Whatever happens, the whole framework of the fifth Republic will very shortly be a thing of the past.

It was no accident that Mélenchon managed to almost double his 2012 score of 11.1%. He embodied the possibility of a Republic which redistributes wealth through fairer taxes, significantly increases the minimum wage, massively invests in public services and ends discrimination against migrants and French citizens of immigrant origins. Workers and young people glimpsed a hope of a fundamental change in their favour. And it was not only French workers who saw this hope in the extraordinary movement against the El Khomry law launched in workplaces and schools and on the streets. Comrades all over the world have followed their movement and their campaign.

But facts are obstinate things. Mélenchon is not in the second round and in the official media no-one talks about why. The main reason is that there was no alliance between Mélenchon's "La France insoumise" (Rebellious France) and the sectors of the Socialist Party which supported Hamon. So

Mélenchon and Hamon are most to blame for the defeat workers suffered and the fact that the choice is now between voting Macron, voting Le Pen, or abstaining. Hamon did indeed try at first to co-opt Mélenchon's campaign, but the latter (scared though he was of seeming to block left unity) realised that he stood to lose more than he gained by this alliance because workers didn't trust the Socialist Party and the weathercocks in it were openly calling for support for Macron. In the end Mélenchon became the candidate of the militant left and Hamon got a mere 6.36% of the total vote and didn't make it into the second round.

What to do on 7 May

The current situation is that the two surviving candidates, Macron and Le Pen, together took less than 50% of the votes cast in the first round, and many people are reluctant to vote or have already decided to give their vote to neither of the candidates. To go by their speeches, they are diametrically opposed to each other on every issue. Macron is in favour of "globalisation", business, the European Union. Le Pen seems to be poles apart from him, talking about globalisation being "out of control", seeking exit from the Euro and for "protection" of wage workers against unfair foreign competition ...

The reality is a little bit different.

Both candidates aim to hold the line for the bourgeoisie, to try to unite "the French people" in order to silence social struggles, the class struggles. The only difference is how they hope to do this, but this difference is important too.

Macron hopes to push the liberal policy of global capitalism to the uttermost, continuing to undermine workers' rights and those of their union representatives.

Macron is the candidate of the financial bourgeoisie which depends on banks and the international exchange of capital and goods. That is why he wants to more or less abolish the ISF (Solidarity Tax on Wealth), further weaken workers' legal rights ("Code du Travail"), stay in the European Union, make life harder for the unemployed and start governing by decree as soon as he takes office. So his mission is to defend the bourgeoisie by taking to the limit the policy it has been following since the fall of the Berlin Wall. i.e. to atomise the working class so as to bring down the price of labour power. Far from cutting mass unemployment, Macron wants to increase the precariousness of work contracts and reduce the power of the unions so as to deprive our class of the means to defend its interests, to bring us to heel.

In contrast to this programme, Marine Le Pen has recently had no difficulty in positioning herself as the candidate of "the people". She does so all the more easily because, especially after the first round, she uses the same vocabulary as Mélenchon. Like him she attacks the "elites" and the "oligarchy" who govern France without regard for the "people". These words serve to mask the reality that workers are sacked not by some oligarchy or abstract elites, but by identifiable bosses who belong, like Marine Le Pen, to the French and international bourgeoisie.

Marine Le Pen presents herself as a candidate close to workers when she calls for a return to retirement

at 60 and the abrogation of the El Khomri labour code law. When she turned up at the Whirlpool workers' picket line on 26 April she spoke against moving the work abroad and the plant closure and said she would put an end to all this, and she gained support among workers driven to desperation. In passing and just before she left, she attacked Macron for meeting union representatives of the workforce away from the factory. More to the point, she insinuated that trade union representatives represent only themselves. No need to read between the lines to understand that if she comes to power, Marine Le Pen will attack the unions and their representatives.

She realises that to win the second round she needs to appear as the candidate who will protect workers from the evils of "globalisation", i.e. capitalism. In the first round, to secure a solid electoral base, she attacked immigrants more and openly advocated so-called "national preference". At present, she emphasises unfair competition by foreign workers. She never mentions the exploitation of workers by employers, French or foreign.

In fact she only mentions competition with foreign workers in order to pit worker against worker, French against foreign, French against immigrant. Marine Le Pen doesn't say so openly, but her conquest of power as prepared by her adviser Florian Filippo aims to divide workers according to their origins in order to maintain the domination of the bourgeoisie in France. Never forget that Marine Le Pen, a fascist from a family of fascists, is above all herself a rich bourgeoisie, a member of the capitalist class. Her objective is to unite bosses and "French" wage-workers against "foreigners" and

“immigrants”. In this sense she seeks to group “all French people”, without distinction of social class, around “love of country”, a project with distinctly fascist overtones. In her view, which she shares with Macron, the right-left divide is no longer justified. This “classless” vision is xenophobic and racist. The “national priority” will be written into the constitution (and if the constitution cannot be modified it will be cast in law). There will be a 5% tax on hiring foreigners, products coming from abroad will be taxed at up to 30%. These measures will not help wage workers. They will enable employers to put immigrant workers under greater pressure, and consequently French workers too, while trying to reserve the French market for the French bourgeoisie to sell their companies’ products.

So we can confidently predict that Marine Le Pen will put little or nothing of her social programme into effect; it is only a façade. On the other hand, if by ill luck she actually does become head of state, she will legalise a new type of manhunt. A Marine Le Pen in power would put the entire State apparatus at the service of a racist policy of division and social exclusion for the benefit of the bourgeoisie. The oppression of workers as a whole would be ramped up, starting with immigrant workers. Her election would empower every kind of racist and fascist, who would not hesitate to attack immigrants and anyone who looks like them. This vote would trigger a wave of attacks against immigrants and migrants, just as the Brexit vote did in the UK and Trump’s election did in the US.

So yes, on 7 May we wage-workers will only be able to choose between two candidates of the bourgeoisie. But between a bourgeois candidate and a racist

bourgeois candidate there is a choice.

Some say they don't want to vote for Macron because they voted for Chirac in 2002, and were disappointed. But in order to be disappointed one must first have had hopes or illusions. In 2017, as in 2002, while the danger is not the same and the situation is different, it is without any illusions in him that we have to vote Macron in order to prevent Marine Le Pen from coming to power. On the contrary, it is those who decide to abstain on the grounds that Macron and Le Pen are identical who are deluded. Believing that Le Pen is no more dangerous than Macron in the short term is the illusion.

So the 23 April result leaves only one option: vote Macron in order to beat Le Pen while openly stating that we must fight both against Macron and against his competitor's racist project. This fight will have to be carried forward in the streets and in mass assemblies, but that does not mean that one can afford the luxury of not voting on 7 May, or the luxury of submitting a blank ballot paper to be counted as a "protest vote" against the appalling choices on offer. That might bring personal satisfaction, but a pretty insipid one, since neither blank ballots nor abstentions count as votes. In the end, every "protest" of this type increases by half the chances that the fascist will be in power on the evening of 7 May.

On May Day, one woman held up a placard saying: "First beat Le Pen, then fight Macron. That is the programme for the next few days."

What prospects after 7 May

We must prepare now to fight off the first attacks

from Macron or Le Pen.

Macron has already announced that he wants to "reform" the country this summer. He has stated that he will rule mainly by decree and the use of Article 49-3 [of the French Constitution which excludes Parliament from voting on bills to do with financial matters or social security financing if the government chooses to accept responsibility]. While Marine Le Pen will launch a xenophobic, racist coup against the workers' movement and in particular the unions if she comes to power, Macron has declared his will be an anti-social coup. We should start now, without delay, to convene assemblies and call for demonstrations demanding the withdrawal of the El Khomri law. It is certainly necessary to fight the Islamist fascists in Daesh, but we cannot count on the bosses' state and its murderous and rapist police to do that. Their state of emergency has served only to normalise the everyday racism of racial profiling controls and to thwart the mobilisation against the El Khomri law. We can only defend our rights by going onto the offensive. The May Day demonstrations totalling 280,000 participants all over France (according to the CGT union) showed that workers are ready to resist. That said, workers need the broadest possible united front. This can only be built around specific demands such as withdrawal of the El Khomri law, the end of the state of emergency, regularisation of undocumented workers, withdrawal of the secondary education reform and retirement for all on a full pension at 60.

In the General (parliamentary) Election, we must make sure that supporters of "Rebellious France", the pro-Hamon sectors of the Socialist Party and the

Communist Party agree on single candidates and do not stand against each other. That will need a reorganisation of workers' political forces by creating a new party supported by the CGT [the main class-conscious trade union confederation], "Rebellious France", the Communist Party, sectors of the Socialist Party still in solidarity with Hamon, and the which must urgently abandon its sectarianism. A party that is not "above classes" but entirely at the service of the working class and other oppressed strata. A party which will open up the political perspective that was so cruelly lacking in last year's struggles. The only real and only possible democratic Sixth Republic; a republic of workers and young people.

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