

French Neo-Fascist “National Front” Victory in European Elections Exposes Bankruptcy of Ruling Elite

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Sunday’s first-place finish by the neo-fascist National Front (FN) in the European elections in France is a devastating exposure of the bankruptcy of the French political establishment. There is rising anger over the wars and austerity policies of the Socialist Party (PS) government and the European Union (EU). Due to the complicity of the entire “left” in these measures, however, it is the extreme-right that has benefited.

The FN’s upset of the traditional parties of the French ruling class was the most striking in a series of elections across Europe, which saw victories for several far-right parties, including Britain’s UK Independence Party and the Danish People’s Party.

According to official results yesterday, the FN obtained 24.85 percent of the vote, relegating the right-wing Union for a Popular Majority (UMP) to second place with 20.80 percent and President François Hollande’s PS to a humiliating third place, with 13.98 percent. The pseudo-left Left Front received only 6.33 percent of the vote, down from 11 percent in the 2012 presidential elections, while the Greens took 8.95 percent and the right-wing Union of Democrats and Independents (UDI) 9.92 percent. The FN took first place in 71 of mainland France’s 96 departments.

The FN received a significant proportion of its vote from workers and youth, including 30 percent of those under 35 (compared to only 15 percent for the PS), 38 percent of employees (16 percent for the PS), and 43 percent of laborers (8 percent for the PS).

While abstention reached a massive 57.57 percent, this did not artificially boost the FN vote. Polls of voters who abstained found that the FN would have received the most votes among them as well.

The FN printed up posters proclaiming itself “the leading party in France.” On Sunday evening, FN leader Marine Le Pen called on Hollande to dissolve the National Assembly and hold new legislative elections to form a new government.

“The president of the Republic must now take the necessary measures for the Assembly to become national, representative of the people and capable of carrying out the policy of independence that the people chose tonight,” Le Pen said. “France must cease giving lessons in democracy to the entire world, and the executive must prepare for elections that will be an even more crushing disavowal.”

Though the FN’s victory was widely anticipated in ruling circles based on polls published in

advance of the elections, it nevertheless sent shock waves through the political establishment. Inside the UMP, concern over the second-place finish is intensifying pressure for party president Jean-François Copé to step down, while fueling speculation that former French President Nicolas Sarkozy will return to public life to lead the UMP.

Hollande is now France's most unpopular president since the office was created in 1958, with only 11 percent support for a 2017 re-election bid. He issued a perfunctory, pre-recorded video address broadcast on the evening news last night.

Admitting that the election signaled broad "distrust of Europe, of the parties of government," Hollande made clear that he would ignore popular anger and enforce the agenda of the financial markets. "My duty is to reform France and reform Europe," Hollande said, adding: "This line of conduct cannot deviate in function of circumstances." He called for implementing the "Responsibility Pact," which mandates €50 billion in cuts and includes a "reform" of local government involving tens of billions of euros in cuts.

PS Prime Minister Manuel Valls called the result an "earthquake," but indicated that he would proceed with the PS' reactionary agenda of tax and social cuts. He also said that the PS would not organize fresh legislative elections as called for by Le Pen.

"Hollande is supposed to get out of the car, dissolve the government, and let the extreme right take over the reins in the country," Valls said, "We will not add to the crisis of identity, to the moral crisis that France is going through, disorder by elections, a country that would be ungovernable."

The vote for the FN is a sign of the historic bankruptcy of the French bourgeoisie and a portent of a coming eruption of class struggle. Whether the unpopular PS government advances its agenda of austerity and war based in its current majority in the National Assembly, or it eventually calls elections and seeks to rule in coalition with right-wing parties, it will face increasing opposition.

The vote does not indicate broad support for the rabid anti-immigrant and protectionist agenda of the FN, let alone for the crimes of its political ancestors, the World War II-era fascist regime of Vichy and the supporters of French colonial rule in Algeria in the 1954-1962 war. An attempt by a FN-led government to impose social cuts and racist policies would soon provoke explosive anger from workers and immigrant youth in the impoverished suburbs of France's cities.

The FN wins votes only by default, due to the rottenness of the "left" parties. In the decades since the first PS president, François Mitterrand, came to power in 1981, the PS, with the support of its pseudo-left allies, has consistently imposed right-wing policies. Starting with Mitterrand's 1983 "austerity turn," the PS pushed through free-market attacks on the working class, wars, and attacks on democratic rights, such as the 2009 ban on the burqa.

The PS has relied on the pseudo-left parties to break up every strike wave or student protest against these policies, while maintaining political alliances with the PS and sowing demoralization about the prospects for socialism. As broader layers of the population become ever more alienated from the political establishment, the FN has been allowed to present its own right-wing policies as "normal" or even oppositional.

A sharp warning is necessary: the rise of the FN is only the most striking expression of the

far-reaching evolution of the entire French ruling class towards far-right policies and anti-democratic forms of rule. This cannot be halted by relying on one or another bourgeois faction. The critical question in France and throughout Europe is the construction of revolutionary socialist parties as sections of the ICFI, to lead an independent struggle of the working class against the threat of fascism.

This weekend's election echoes, at a higher political temperature, the events twelve years ago in the first round of the French presidential elections on April 21, 2002. PS candidate Lionel Jospin was eliminated by the UMP's Jacques Chirac and the FN's Jean-Marie Le Pen due to the unpopularity of his Plural Left government's austerity policies. Mass protests broke out against the false "choice" between Chirac and Le Pen on the second round.

The pseudo-left Revolutionary Communist League (LCR, the forerunner of the NPA), Workers Struggle (LO), and the Workers Party (now the Independent Workers Party) rejected the ICFI's call for an active boycott of the elections, as a basis for an independent movement of the working class against the wars and social attacks Chirac would impose once he was re-elected.

Instead, along with the PS, they promoted illusions that voting for Chirac could halt the rise of the FN and moderate Chirac's policies.

Over a decade later, the pro-capitalist illusions peddled by the pseudo-left parties have been mercilessly refuted by events. Far from halting the rise of the FN, they have themselves functioned as instruments of a shift far to the right of the entire political establishment. They called for the election of the reactionary Hollande government, and they are backing the PS as it embarks on wars and imperialist interventions—including in Ukraine, where Paris, Washington, and Berlin are working with outright fascists in the Right Sector militia.

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