

French snap elections: Macron's party collapses as New Popular Front, neo-fascists rise

Alex Lantier
1 July 2024

President Emmanuel Macron suffered another humiliating setback yesterday in the first round of the snap elections he called after his party's defeat in the European elections. Both the neo-fascist National Rally (RN) and Jean-Luc Mélenchon's New Popular Front (NFP) surged in the vote, to 33 and 28 percent, respectively. Meanwhile Macron's Ensemble coalition fell to 20 percent.

Projections of who would win seats in the July 7 second round are uncertain, most show the RN falling short of the 289 seats needed for an absolute majority in the 577-seat Assembly. It would win between 230 and 280 seats. The NFP would have between 125 and 165, while Ensemble would fall to a rump of between 70 and 100 seats. The right-wing The Republicans (LR) party, which took 9 percent of the vote, would have 40 to 60 seats.

This is a resounding disavowal of Macron. He campaigned as a defender of French democracy against the "extremes" of the NFP and the RN, and advocated a deployment of ground troops to Ukraine for war with Russia. Neither of these arguments won him support. It is well known among workers that Macron rules against the people, slashing pensions and other social programs in the face of overwhelming popular opposition, and that the war plans he and NATO are supporting pose the risk of catastrophic escalation.

Instead, on voter turnout of 66 percent—the highest in 30 years for a legislative election—voters reduced Macron's party to a rump in the National Assembly. All projections show his party being a junior partner in whatever governmental coalition is assembled in parliament after the second round on Sunday.

Macron issued a statement last night indicating that

he would likely seek a government alliance with the NFP and LR against the RN. "The high voter turnout in the first round of these legislative elections shows the importance of this vote for our compatriots and their desire to clarify the political situation," he said. Calling for an all-party anti-RN alliance, Macron declared, "against the National Rally a broad, clearly democratic and republican coalition for the second round."

Outgoing Prime Minister Gabriel Attal called for coalitions to be formed that are "capable of defeating the National Rally and with whom [Ensemble] shares the most important thing: the values of the Republic." Attal also announced he was suspending his widely unpopular plans for cuts to unemployment insurance after Ensemble's defeat.

RN party leader Marine Le Pen and prime ministerial candidate Jordan Bardella both appealed to voters to give the RN an absolute majority in the second round, so it could form a government.

"The French have shown their desire to turn the page after seven years of a government that was contemptuous and corrosive," Le Pen said. "We need an absolute majority. I invite you to renew your vote if you voted for us ... If you made another choice, I invite you to come join the coalition of security, liberty and unity."

"The presidential camp ... is no longer in a position to win," Bardella said, calling his party "a patriotic rampart that can make France win" against the far-left threat. He said that, if elected, he would be "respectful of the Constitution and the office of the President of the Republic, but intransigent on the policy we want to put into action."

For his part, NFP leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon framed

the second round of the snap elections as a choice between his party coalition and neo-fascism.

He said, “We are going towards a second round of exceptional intensity. The country must choose. Will it aggravate the worst of its divisions, those of social inequalities, religion, skin color, of social or geographic origin, or will it come together to form just one people without any preconditions? That is the choice in the second round. ... In these conditions, we can have no other propositions or reasonable demands beyond this: the New Popular Front needs an absolute majority.”

As of last night, Mélenchon’s position within the NFP was somewhat strengthened by the election debacles facing two of his rivals inside the NFP. Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF) leader Fabien Roussel, who made virulent law-and-order criticisms of Mélenchon, was eliminated outright in the first round in the North district.

François Ruffin, an aggressive promoter of the Ukraine war within LFI, was trounced into second place by RN candidate Nathalie Ribeiro-Billet in the Somme district and is now fighting to keep his parliamentary seat.

Mélenchon, who has repeatedly offered to serve as prime minister under Macron, also signaled however that the NFP will support Macron’s candidates against the RN. If the NFP could take away votes from an Ensemble candidate and thus allow the RN to win, he said, “we will withdraw our candidates, wherever it is, in all circumstances. ... Not a single vote, not a single seat more for the RN. Our policy is clear, our policy is simple.”

In reality, the only clear and simple element of the situation is the massive rejection by workers and youth of Macron’s policies of war, austerity and police-state dictatorship. The vote in France is simply one expression of the far broader rejection in the working class internationally of military escalation in Ukraine, the genocide in Gaza and austerity policies that are being imposed by capitalist police states around the world.

But the French political establishment does not give expression to these sentiments of workers and youth, and the outcome of the elections still is impossible to tell. The balance of forces in the Assembly remains unclear, as is the position that LR would take were Macron to ask it to support a coalition government

between the NFP and Ensemble.

Eric Ciotti, the leading partisan inside LR of a unity with the RN, issued a statement last night calling to form a RN-LR government alliance: “Tonight, it is no longer possible to refuse to choose between our responsible, patriotic and Republican union and the terrifying far left danger. I call upon all The Republicans to follow the path to unity that I have opened up.”

Above all, a coalition government formed between Mélenchon’s NFP, Macron’s Ensemble and possibly a faction of LR, offers nothing to the working class. It would be a capitalist government based on coalitions with explicitly right-wing forces. Moreover, the NFP’s program commits it to troop deployments and arms deliveries to Ukraine and a build-up of French military police and intelligence services that would make it compatible with Macron’s aggressive, anti-worker agenda.

Were such a coalition government to be formed, it would amount to an attempt by French finance capital to integrate the NFP and Mélenchon more directly into the halls of power, as an instrument to pursue its imperialist interests. This government would, sooner rather than later, find itself in overt conflict with the working class.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact