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Parisian workers who voted for Mélenchon speak out on French election



Jean-Luc Mélenchon comments on preliminary results of the first round of the presidential election in Paris, France, Sunday, April 10, 2022. (AP Photo/Michel Spingler)

Anger is rising in the working class districts of the Paris area that voted for Jean-Luc Mélenchon in the presidential elections. Workers and youth now face a second round between two right-wing candidates, Macron and Marine Le Pen. Mélenchon's call to vote for Macron, the "president of the rich," is not convincing to his voters, and large layers of voters are considering abstention.

WSWS reporters interviewed workers and young people to discuss the perspective of campaigning for an active boycott of the second round advanced by the Parti de l'égalité socialiste, the French section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).

Michel, a computer technician who works in the Paris suburbs, told the WSWS of his fear of the rise of the far right and the danger of war.

He said, "I am very concerned about the political situation in France. It is clear that if the situation continues as it is, the future for ordinary people and our children will be much worse. In the last five years of Macron's rule, prices have surged, especially for petrol and diesel. Because of this, the prices of all basic goods have increased. I drive 45 km [28 miles] a day to work. The price of petrol has doubled. The prices of raw materials have also doubled because of the increase in fuel prices."

Michel also stressed his hostility to the war in Ukraine and the intervention of France and NATO against Russia. "Now the war in Ukraine has made the situation worse," he said. "France is also making dangerous preparations for war against Russia. Those who lead us do not think about the future of our children, except insofar as they want to exploit them."

Michel stressed his disappointment at Mélenchon's call to vote Macron: "I thought this party would be against Macron and the racist Le Pen. Mélenchon was beaten by a small margin. Now millions like me are forced to choose in the second round between the two worst candidates. Mélenchon, who got 22 per cent of the vote, had neither the courage nor the programme to take the country to the next level... Mélenchon called on us to vote for Macron."

Michel remarked that the SEP perspective "makes you think," adding, "Whoever wins, the country will be pushed to the brink. So I'm not going to vote for either one in the second round of the election. Macron is raising our retirement age to 65. He has many other plans to impose on us. Le Pen is against immigrants and Muslims, and she will impose austerity. ... The future is going to be dangerous for us."

Rajesh, a delivery man, explained to the WSWS why he voted for Mélenchon: "With a family and two children relying on me, I end my months on a tight budget and have done

so for several years now. The department I live in, Seine Saint-Denis [the working class northern suburbs of Paris], which is socially fragmented, is seeing its situation impoverished, the situation is darkened by the global pandemic and inflation.”

Rajesh said he wanted the election to “give hope to humble people like me who count on the left to lift us out of misery. So this hope for change in our current democracy made me vote for Jean-Luc Mélenchon. But now we are faced with a second round of voting between a candidate who claims to be neither left nor right but is implementing right-wing policies ... and on the other side, a party that stems from a racist and xenophobic figure.”

Rajesh highlighted the heavy economic burden on working people of the European Union’s mishandling of the pandemic and now the danger of a NATO war with Russia.

He said, “Before COVID-19, when I went to the market every week, I used to buy a kilogram of tomatoes for €1.20. Now I don’t go to the market as much to buy them because the price has gone up to €4. This is just one example among many. ... Rich people are spared from crises, but we, the working and middle classes, are the victims of Macron’s social crush. I agree with you: we need an alternative policy.”

The WSWS also spoke to several young people who had voted for Mélenchon hoping to get rid of the policies made by Macron during his five-year term.

Julin, a student, observed that now that Le Pen was the only opponent of Macron, he saw no other choice but a blank vote to show his opposition. He said, “I would rather vote blank than vote for Marine Le Pen, because I find her programme totally racist. She wants a France without immigrants.”

Valantina, a student, said it was the first time she had gone to vote and that she had voted for Mélenchon: “But unfortunately he didn’t pass because he was a few percent short. Following his defeat, he is appealing to Emmanuel Macron.”

She stressed her surprise and displeasure at Mélenchon’s decision to call for a Macron vote. She said, “It personally shocked and astonished me because Jean-Luc-Mélenchon is supposed to be on the left, while Emmanuel Macron is on the right. How can he tell us to vote for a man who is not even from the same political side? He has no right to ask us to vote for Macron. ... We voted for him because we thought he was a man of the left who

would solve social problems, but instead he calls for us to vote for the right. He is like the others, we should not have trusted him.”

Valantina explained that she could not consider voting for either Macron or Le Pen: “I would not vote for either of them, because with the current president we have experienced many difficulties, like the Yellow Vests crisis. [Macron] was very violent against the protesters.”

On the PES’ call for an active boycott of the second round of the presidential elections, she said, “I agree with what you said about the active boycott. I don’t intend to vote for either of them. We need to build a party for the interest of the majority of the people.”

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