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## ***Macron-Le Pen debate shows rising danger of far-right dictatorship in France***

The debate between neo-fascist candidate Marine Le Pen and incumbent President Emmanuel Macron shows the mounting danger of fascistic dictatorship in France.

The debate was relatively muted. Macron, a banker whose staff has warned him against appearing arrogant, and Le Pen, who has spent a decade “de-demonizing” her neo-fascist party, both visibly strained to avoid outbursts or mannerisms that could alienate voters. Both made clear their respect for each other, with Macron in particular repeating telling Le Pen, “You are right.” Ultimately, the debate showed above all the very limited character of the differences separating Macron from a political descendant of the collaboration with Nazism in France.

The *Parti de l'égalité socialiste* (PES) has insisted that the struggle against the danger of far-right rule can only proceed by the independent mobilization of the working class, rejecting both candidates and boycotting the election. This is the best way to prepare the struggles that will emerge against the vicious attacks that the winner in the election—be it Le Pen or Macron—will launch against the workers.’

The debate began on the question of inflation and workers’ purchasing power, which has collapsed amid a surge in prices for energy and food. Le Pen said she “only met Frenchmen who said they can no longer make ends meet” and criticized the staggering rise in natural gas prices internationally and in France as NATO countries impose sanctions on Russian gas exports.

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Macron attacked Le Pen's social demagoguery largely from the right, arguing that any attempts to address popular grievances against his policies were unrealistic. He accused her of having voted against his government's measure temporarily freezing any further increase in natural gas prices. After Le Pen accused Macron of making 400,000 people fall under the poverty line during his term, he accused her of questioning business privileges: "You will not decide for the employer, Mrs Le Pen. You will not dictate what salaries will be."

Both candidates aligned themselves with the war NATO is waging against Russia in Ukraine and were silent on Biden's comment that the Pentagon is considering the possibility of 45 to 60 million deaths. As Macron applauded NATO's policy of waging war against Russia in Ukraine, Le Pen responded: "The efforts you have made to try to find, in the name of France, ways and means for peace deserve support."

Under conditions where significant layers of workers in France are considering a Le Pen vote out of anger at Macron, one must state that this endorsement of Macron's Russia policy is one point among many that shows that Le Pen is also a tool of the French banks and financial aristocracy.

When Le Pen called Macron's deeply unpopular call to raise the retirement age to 65 an "intolerable injustice," and Macron reacted by attacking Le Pen's plans for financing pensions, this provoked a brief exchange on the pandemic. "Do not lecture me on the financing of my plans," Le Pen said, criticizing the "600 billion euros in extra debt" Macron made during his term.

Macron replied by defending his murderous policy of mass infection on the COVID-19 pandemic, which has already cost 144,000 lives in France alone. Trillion-euro pandemic bailouts massively enriched the banks, with the fortune of billionaire Bernard Arnault going from \$70 billion to \$167 billion. But Macron hypocritically claimed it was a defense of lives, health, and small businesses: "How dare anyone say that we helped big businesses? Ask small businesses, artisans ... Those numbers, we saved lives with them."

Le Pen, whose party denounced COVID-19 vaccines that were highly popular in France, was silent on the mass deaths through which Macron enriched his billionaire friends and backers. Her attempts to exploit the "yellow vest" protests for social equality against

Macron also fell short, as she also applauded Macron's cops who violently assaulted them. "The 'yellow vests' aspired to democracy, they were not listened to," Le Pen lamented, before saying that police should have the right to a "presumption of legitimate self-defense" in cases of police brutality.

Macron took Le Pen's raising of the police as an opportunity to attack her from the right. He denounced Le Pen for having criticized "the policemen of Mr Darmanin," Macron's interior minister, after they brutally threw a protester out of one of Le Pen's press conferences.

As the debate drew to a close, they turned to attacks on immigration and Islam. Le Pen violently denounced immigrants: "We face true barbarism, a turn to savagery. We are wounded, we are brutalized, people jump at our heads and try to murder us. It cannot continue like this." She also denounced the Islamic veil as a "uniform imposed by Islamists."

Macron responded by warning Le Pen, "You will trigger civil war," and, with unparalleled hypocrisy, posing as a defender of "universalist France." He declared that it would be "to betray the Republic" if France became "the first country in the world to ban a religious symbol in public spaces."

In fact, after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Macron imposed an "anti-separatist law" allowing for the arbitrary dissolution of Muslim associations and the repression of their officials by the state. This law was imposed by Gérald Darmanin, a sympathizer of the far-right *Action française* party, who then denounced Le Pen as "soft" on Islam. That is, Macron sought to distract from mounting class tensions by inciting xenophobia and nationalism and bolstering fascistic forces in the police-state machine.

Against Macron, it must be added that France has already become a country that totally bans religious symbols, the burqa and the niqab, in 2010. If Macron truly believed that this betrayed the Republic and democracy, he could clearly have denounced this anti-democratic measure when he took office in 2017. But he did not, and his "democratic" posturing against Le Pen is political charlatanry.

The debate testified to a reactionary consensus that has emerged in the ruling class over the period since the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. NATO imperialist wars, from the 1991 Gulf War in Iraq and Yugoslavia to Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, Mali and now Russia have received ever deeper support in ruling circles. Similarly, the plundering of society by the financial aristocracy and the permanent inciting of xenophobic hatreds has shifted the entire ruling class far to the right.

After having implemented a policy of mass death on COVID-19 and acquiesced to the NATO war drive against Russia, whatever residual commitment to democratic rights might have existed in French ruling circles has evaporated.

On Wednesday night, as he concluded the debate, Macron told Le Pen: “I fight your ideas, I fight your party, [but] I respect you as a person.” This is an unambiguous signal that the French bourgeoisie is willing to accept a neo-fascist in the Elysée presidential palace, and that Macron himself is on an extreme-right course.

The alternative to the wild movement of the ruling class to the right, as the PES explains, is to fight for an active boycott of the election and the rejection of both Macron and Le Pen. This aims to politically mobilize the working class, forge among workers independent organizations of struggle, and prepare the workers to build a powerful movement against both Macron and Le Pen in a struggle for socialism.

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