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## *Hung parliament emerges from French legislative elections in debacle for Macron*

President Emmanuel Macron's Ensemble ("Together") coalition failed to win a majority of France's National Assembly in the second round of the French legislative elections yesterday. The result, coming amid a wave of strikes and protests against inflation, is a stinging defeat for Macron. It is the first time since 1988 that the president's party failed to win an absolute majority of 289 in the 577-seat Assembly in legislative elections immediately following a presidential election.



French President Emmanuel Macron delivers his speech during a presidential campaign news conference in Aubervilliers, north of Paris, France, Thursday, March 17, 2022. (AP Photo/Thibault Camus)

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According to Interior Ministry figures early this morning, Ensemble won 246 seats, Jean-Luc Mélenchon's New Popular, Ecological and Social Union (NUPES) 142, Marine Le Pen's neo-fascist National Rally (NR) 89, and the right-wing The Republicans (LR) 64. Abstention hit a record high of 54 percent.

Macron campaigned on an anti-worker programme of raising the retirement age by three years to 65, forcing welfare recipients to work for their benefits, and hiking university tuition. Coming amid strikes in airports, health care, trucking and mass transit against the surge in prices and to demand wage increases and more purchasing power, the result was a disaster.

Leading Ensemble candidates suffered humiliating defeats. Former Interior Minister and parliamentary group chairman for Macron's Republic on the March (LREM) party Christophe Castaner lost to NUPES candidate Léo Walter in the Alpes-de-Haute-Provence. Former National Assembly speaker and LREM leader Richard Ferrand was beaten in the Finistère region of Brittany.

Several ministers of the interim government Macron installed after the April 24 presidential elections failed to win re-election. Health Minister Brigitte Bourguignon, Sea Minister Justine Benin and Ecology Minister Amélie de Montchalin were all eliminated and will now have to leave the government. Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne narrowly won re-election with 52 percent of the vote against a young and unknown NUPES challenger, Noé Gauchard.

Former Health Minister Olivier Véran told TF1 television that despite failing to win a majority, Macron would manage to keep ramming through his social cuts. "We will very rapidly build a majority so it becomes absolute in the National Assembly, we will see what the conditions involved will be," Véran said, adding: "Other parliamentary groups will provide us with enough votes to present reforms and get them passed."

LR parliamentary group president Christian Jacob announced that his deputies would not support Macron's agenda. "As far as we are concerned, we campaigned in the opposition, we are an opposition, and we will stay in opposition," Jacob said.

Mélenchon, whose NUPES coalition is now the principal parliamentary opposition party, said that the “debacle of the presidential party” was “total.”

Mélenchon repeated his argument that France is now polarized in three camps, between Macron’s “liberals,” the far right, and his “popular” party. He said, “France expressed itself, insufficiently it must be said, because the abstention levels are still far too high, which means that much of France does not know where to turn, and the three blocs are at similar levels.”

He criticized Macron’s party for not clearly calling to vote for NUPES against RN candidates and thus helping the RN reach its record score in the elections. “It’s the failure of Macronism, the moral failure of all those who lectured everyone. They reinforced the RN. The Macronists lectured us but they were not able to give a clear vote call in 52 districts, which means that they can’t give us moral lessons about anything at all.”

Mélenchon won a large vote by pledging to bring the retirement age back to 60, freeze prices, and oppose Macron’s anti-social agenda. However, it is also clear that his entire perspective for the legislative elections, based on ignoring the class struggle and making no attempt to mobilize his millions of working class voters in mass protests or strikes, has failed. He said he could impose his social agenda by winning a majority of the Assembly and becoming prime minister.

While polls always showed that the NUPES would fail to win a majority, Mélenchon claimed that his parliamentary actions would stop Macron’s cuts and impose a more progressive government.

The hung parliament reveals the rapid escalation of political tensions in France and internationally. It portends a protracted crisis, as Macron scrambles to rally support for his legislative agenda, perhaps from either LR or Mélenchon’s NUPES. At the same time, the ruling class is channeling enormous efforts and resources behind neo-fascists and allied elements of the officer corps who have called for the deployment of the army in France to carry out domestic repression.

Le Pen hailed her RN’s parliamentary group, noting that it is “by far the largest in the history of our political tendency. ... The people has decided to send a very powerful

parliamentary group of deputies from the National Rally to the Assembly.” She declared forthrightly that she plans to take power after Macron’s term is over.

Calling the newly-elected RN deputies the “vanguard of the new political elite that will take power when the Macron adventure ends,” she said: “We have attained the three objectives we set ourselves. These were: making Emmanuel Macron a minority president; ... seeking to carry out the necessary political recomposition; ... and building a viable opposition group to both the deconstructionists from above, the Macronists, and the deconstructionists from below, the anti-Republican far left.”

The hung parliament, the collapse of Macron’s party and the rapid growth of both the far right and of Mélenchon’s party are so many warnings that irreconcilable political and class conflicts are mounting in France and across Europe.

France and the entire NATO alliance are recklessly waging war with Russia in Ukraine, and Macron has called to issue requisitions to French industry and impose a “war economy” on the workers. At the same time, the explosive growth of inflation is provoking an upsurge of class struggles across the region. There have been nationwide public sector strikes in Tunisia and Italy, there will be similar national strikes in Morocco and Belgium today, and airports are on strike across Europe. In France, truckers and public transport workers are preparing a wave of strikes over the next two weeks.

Mélenchon’s failure to call substantial protests or become prime minister, as he had claimed he would, must be taken as a warning. Amid an explosive upsurge of the class struggle in France and across Europe, the ruling class is responding by putting forward law-and-order figures like Macron and supporters of far-right repression like Le Pen. Mélenchon himself, who has remained virtually silent on the coup threats from General Pierre de Villiers and his entourage, has outlined no clear perspective to mobilize a struggle against them.

Instead, when Macron traveled to Kiev to pledge Ukraine military assistance and put France in a “war economy” to prosecute war with Russia, Mélenchon supported him. Mélenchon told France Bleu radio: “I want to first of all echo [Macron’s] message of solidarity with Ukraine. I did this during the entire presidential campaign, I think it is good for the president to recall what side the French people are on—all of them, without

exception.” This capitulation to Macron’s arguments for imperialist war sets the stage for capitulation to Macron all down the line.

The solution to the mounting crisis of capitalism will not be found in the French parliament, or in the manoeuvres of Mélenchon and the French union bureaucracy, but in the global class struggle. A powerful and growing movement of strikes is opposing mass impoverishment via inflation and the mounting danger of all-out war between the major nuclear powers.

The way forward is to clarify within this developing movement the necessity of the international unification of the working class in a movement opposing imperialist war and fighting for a socialist transfer of state power to the working class.

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