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France

“Bordeaux En Lutttes” 11.7% for an anticapitalist programme

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Philippe Poutou, spokesperson of the NP, led a broad list of trade-unionist and local activists in the local election campaign in Bordeaux to a striking 11.7% score on 15 March. This means it can stand in the second round which, originally scheduled one week later for 22 March, will now be held in June at a date to be announced. [1]

The Macron government decided to maintain the first round of the local elections on 15 March although school closures had already been announced and full lockdown was to come just a day later. This much-criticized decision led to a number of cases of Covid-19 infection and deaths among those who staffed polling stations, including at least three local mayors. [IVP]

It has been a month since the first round of the municipal elections in France and yet it already seems like eternity. In fact, the announcement of the start of lockdown and the postponement of the second round of the elections came the day after the first round voting on 15 March 2020.

Since then, whether we are strictly isolated or relatively so for those who continue to work, concerns have been largely dominated by the spread of the epidemic, according to the sobering statistics for those who die or return to intensive care. The election and its campaign are therefore distant, and assessments have not been made. Once this introduction has been made, we can try to make at least a first attempt at analysis.

On Sunday, 15 March, the atmosphere was already heavy. Maintaining the vote was highly contested because of the risks it posed to the population. Abstention was also at a record level, limiting the validity of this election. The first rules of social distancing having been in place for three days, we had logically cancelled the election night gathering.

We therefore could not "celebrate" our result of 11.77% which enabled us to qualify for the second round and therefore to remain in the race to obtain municipal councillors, which has been our goal from the start. Not through electoralism and having positions but to continue the political battle for the next six years and not just be protesters during the campaign month.

Birth of a list, a team, a dynamic

Before running the campaign, we had to go through a difficult period, which would leave its mark. Several weeks marked by significant strategic disagreements within the Nouveau Parti anticapitaliste (NPA) as well as among activists more generally concerning the question of a unitary list which would group organizations which are usually separate, namely the NPA and France Insoumise (FI).

It was the Bordeaux Debout collective, bringing together activists in France Insoumise, trade unionists, *gilets jaunes* and associations which took the initiative of proposing that the NPA consider a common list. On both sides, this caused a crisis and ruptures. Despite the tensions, the discussion went on to the end. On both sides, activists fought to reach a political agreement, a unity that appeared to be beneficial, promising a campaign that would make some noise and be effective through bringing together diverse activist circles.

For the first time in Bordeaux, the right - in power since 1944 - was threatened and the "left" had a historic chance of

winning. The issue in this election was this alternative. So we needed a list capable of representing something other than the right-left swing, of defending a perspective based more on class struggle, that of a popular Bordeaux against a bourgeois Bordeaux, that of a real social alternative.

And for the first time too, a list expressing social anger, representative of our camp, proposing an anti-capitalist programme of rupture, succeeded in existing, being heard, appearing to be credible.

A minority with no chance of winning, but making an impact

Because it was unitary, our list managed to bring people together, to encourage activism, to lead the battle. We immediately felt it around us, everywhere, our list and our ideas aroused enthusiasm, hope and at least curiosity. We quickly saw this in the polls, which gave us 9%, 12% and 11%. Forecasts that can be taken with a pinch of salt, but which made it possible to have elected officials. And so that gave a reason to vote for us. Voting for us became a useful vote, useful for obtaining councillors representing the proletariat, the precarious, rank and file employees, demonstrators, protesters, anti-capitalists in the Bordeaux parliament, at the Palais Rohan, in Bordeaux, a bourgeois city, what a symbol, what a feat!

We can't claim to have turned everything upside down. Of course not. Our campaign does not change the situation, power will remain in the hands of the Bordeaux bourgeoisie. The Juppeist right and the social-ecological-liberal left came a long way ahead of us (34% each). Even the Macronians, in bad shape, took third place just in front of us (12.6%). But we came fourth with 11.77%. The goal is reached.

The fact of not having been able to go to the end of the process does not allow for a real assessment. But we have plenty to do for the future. The activist team is determined to resume the battle, to make ourselves heard even louder next time. We are going to stay the course, that of our revolt, of direct democracy, of the sharing of wealth, of a social emergency plan. And in fact, we will also stay the course against the false right-left alternative, against pressure and blackmail trying to make us responsible for another victory for the right. We have managed, in our opinion, to enforce the existence of a list representing our social camp, not seen simply as a divider of the left, as useless or harmful but as a list which has its full legitimacy.

This is what we will remember, as an air of small victory, like a scent of pride widely shared among the population. For many people, whether they voted for us or not, we made an impression, we made some noise, shook the political landscape, we certainly succeeded in bringing something else into being, on a modest scale but real.

17 April 2020

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[1] Where lists won more than 50% of the vote, their election has been validated although normally it is only confirmed at the completion of the process, that is the conclusion of the second round.