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France

Front national: Predictable progress, a danger to fight

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In number of votes, the far right is growing. It is one of the dangers of the time. To counter it, moral pieties are not enough, when the concrete policy of the left in power is to put itself at the service of the power of money and capital. That is why we need an anti-capitalist party, and a workers' movement capable of opposing austerity wherever it comes from.

Marine le Pen did not make it to the second round, but she won 6.4 million votes and 17.90 % of the poll. This has a significant impact on the relationship of political forces emerging from April 22 and May 6, and will weigh on the subsequent parliamentary elections.

In 2002, Le Pen and Megret scored 19.20 % or 5.48 million votes, while the CPNT (the "hunters and fishers party"), a part of whose electorate is close to the far right, scored 4.23%. Marine Le Pen thus lost 1.3% but with a higher rate of participation she gained 900,000 votes.

Behind the figures, there are notable developments. The FN vote fell sharply in the big cities and the working class suburbs, where it was often behind the Front de gauche. It fell by more than 5% in Lyon, Toulouse, Montpellier and Nice, and 4% in Lille, Paris and Marseille. In ten big cities out of fifteen, the FdG beat the FN. In five city suburbs in the most deprived neighbourhoods (Grigny, Vaulx-en-Velin, Saint-Denis, la Courneuve and Aubervilliers), the far right went from 20.63% in 2002 to 11.88 %. The FN did not really progress in its eastern bastions stretching from the Gard to the Moselle, on the contrary it went from 10 to 15% in the rural departments of the west (Dordogne, Cantal, Landes, Charente and so on).

Sarkozy lost 1.69 million votes in relation to 2007, while benefiting from some of the 3.5 million voters lost by Bayrou. Le Pen's gains came mainly from this electorate of the right. Her strategy, seeking to break the ostracism to which her party has been subjected, worked. And this at a time when the defeat of Sarkozy and his politics of flattering far right prejudices while playing footsy with Bayrou has left the right weakened and divided.

Left capitulation, right demagoguery

The political mechanisms which have led to this situation emerge from the capitulation and impotence of the left as well as the populist demagoguery of the right, amplified by the pressures of the crisis. These are the essential components of a latent political crisis, which rapidly wears out the ruling teams, sharpens the contradictions between deeds and words, and strips bare the lies of the politicians, resented as so many contemptuous aggressions by the workers and the popular classes.

This logic was established in the first presidential term of François Mitterrand, when the right and the left cohabited in the management of affairs. It continued before the crisis came to put left and right policies back to back, both subjecting, through Europe, the interests of the people to the defence of the interests of the financial and industrial groups. The demoralisation of the world of work, struck full on by flexibility, unemployment, the degradation of living and working conditions, generalised social insecurity, has created the terrain on which reactionary prejudices have blossomed. All the more so in that the right tries to maintain its influence over a part of its electorate by playing the same sinister demagogic music, thus aiding the FN.

The left has remained incapable of reacting or offering a perspective, because it is subject to the established order, to

the will of the powerful. Its victory does not reverse this evolution because it results from the rejection of Sarkozy, not from a politics rallying the popular classes in a perspective of challenging the dictatorship of finance. It left the field free to Marine Le Pen and her politics which divert social discontent onto the terrain of nationalism, chauvinism and racism.

That said, given the evolution of the FN's results, the left dynamic expressed above all around the Front de gauche, but also witnessed in the campaigns of Philippe Poutou and Nathalie Arthaud, illustrates the instability of the situation and what is at stake in the coming social and political struggles. Nothing is settled. Certainly, the political developments these elections bear witness to are also taking place in numerous other European countries, with the emergence of far right populist parties or even genuinely fascist formations, using physical violence against the workers' movement. But there is nothing automatic about this. What happens depends on the capacity of the workers' movement, both trade union and political wings, to retake the initiative by affirming itself as a force of opposition to austerity policies, including those of the left.

“La chef de l'opposition, c'est moi”

Marine Le Pen wants to create a new party of which she will be the axis, a party of the far right, nationalist and chauvinist, anti-immigrant, hostile to Europe and relying on its collapse, bringing together the FN and a part of the UMP. On May 1 she evoked the beginning of a “historic combat” for “the great party of national coming together”. The next stage will be the parliamentary elections in June, during which she wants to see “a massive entry into the national assembly of the ‘Rassemblement bleu marine’.”

On April 22 the FN scored more than 12.5% of those registered to vote – the threshold for going through to the second round of the parliamentary elections – in 353 circumscriptions out of 577. Even if its vote falls, it has a great nuisance capacity for the UMP. Obtaining deputies is another affair. However, the situation created after the presidential election constitutes a serious warning. It is clear that the influence of the far right, its ability to find a place in the institutional game and in the life of the county, represents a terrible danger for workers. It reflects a degradation of the relationship of forces in favour of the dominant classes.

A necessary counter-offensive

These elections constitute a warning; The left in power will bend to the needs of the markets, and the banks. François Hollande has undertaken to honour the illegitimate and unjust debt. His “humanist” speeches, like those on equality and justice, will in no way prevent him from defending national identity and counter-posing it to immigration.

In this social and political battle which is opening, what matters is not to abandon the terrain to the far right, but to build against it, but also against the neoliberal government, a left opposition force; a force which fights for the world of labour and of youth, to defend their rights, to fight for solidarity among all the exploited whatever their origin in the daily life of the neighbourhoods and workplaces, to combat racism; a force which situates its combat at the level of all Europe, against all nationalist and chauvinist reflexes. The task is to unite the world of labour and its organisations against any policy of austerity, to put an end to the dictatorship of the financial and industrial groups