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France

After the first round of the presidential elections

- IV Online magazine - 2017 - IV508 - May 2017 -

Publication date: Wednesday 3 May 2017

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The text below, based on a draft presented by the two signatories, was debated, enriched and presented at the last meeting of the NPA CPN (National political Council) on April 29 and 30. Although it gained the most votes of the CPN members, it did not get an absolute majority. There was no majority vote on political orientation in this session.

It seems important to make it public as an analysis shared by the majority of those who actively led the campaign and as a contribution to a debate that goes far beyond the ranks of the NPA. â€”Léon Crémieux, Antoine Larrache

The first round of the French presidential election has confirmed what was apparent during the three months preceding the vote:

- A deep crisis of the two parties which have structured the country’s institutions for 60 years. Les Républicains (LR, the heir of the UMP, the party created by Jacques Chirac) and the Parti Socialiste (PS), with a strong political polarization to the right.
- The taking root of the Front National (FN), which came first in half of the departments and has gone forward to the second round, testifying to the “de-demonization” of this far right party and of the fascist wing of its leadership, by polarizing the popular classes through a nationalist and racist politics.
- The intervention of Macron, with his “anti-system” image succeeded in dislocating the electorate and a part of the Socialist apparatus and attracting a significant fringe of the centre right electorate.
- Significant progression for Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who also siphoned off a part of the socialist vote and succeeded in appearing as the only solid candidate of the left.
- The ability of the NPA to overcome the obstacle of gaining 500 signatures and to conduct an excellent anti-capitalist campaign making a broad impact on several social issues and policies, even if there has been a lag between the sympathetic response met and the score obtained.

1/ Deep instability, polarization to the right

The crisis of the PS and LR will, in different ways, go on deepening after the first round. The PS could actually break up, with a part of the apparatus around Valls announcing already the decision to split so as to join a possible presidential majority around Macron. It will be difficult for the rest of the apparatus to hold back this drift. On the one hand, the return to a social democrat and Keynesian identity had been widely acclaimed by the voters of the primaries of the left, in January, which rejected the continuation of austerity policies. On the other, the essence of the PS apparatus has been won long since to social liberalism and Macron occupies this space. The survival of the PS as a party of the first level is therefore no longer ensured.

LR face difficulties of a different nature. With his candidacy, even before its scandals, Fillon had crystallized a combative far right, galvanizing the most reactionary and traditionalist sectors of the right electorate. It is around this

axis that the campaign has been conducted, ruling out any program able to address a popular right electorate shocked by scandal and corruption. LR will try to rectify this. If their crisis is less deep than the PS, here also a part of the apparatus and party leadership, like the young people around Alain Juppé, Estrossi and Le Maire, are ready to play the Macron card, inasmuch as he is ready to open the door to them sufficiently after the 2nd round.

In any case even if, in the event of the election of Macron, the latter receives enough momentum for the legislative elections to win a majority for "En Marche", the heterogeneity of this formation would open a period of parliamentary instability which has already pushed Macron to promise to legislate by decree.

If the institutions of the Fifth Republic have been able to adapt over 60 years to many political and social convulsions, they require the presence of a president structuring a majority party. Hollande has been blocked during his period in office by the inability to manage his own majority. This could be repeated in the coming months. Windows will open for mobilizations and questioning of the legitimacy of the regime.

This overall situation reflects the general difficulty of the bourgeois parties in maintaining any political credibility and adequate social base after decades of undermining of the social state, of massive unemployment, and austerity policies which are hitting the popular classes. This policy, implemented in France in the framework of the European Union, has resulted in the fact that the extreme right plus the combative right (Le Pen + Fillon + Dupont-Aignan + Asselineau) polarized 47% of the vote in this first round and more than 24% voted for a candidate who promises the accelerated implementation of a neoliberal capitalist programme. The nature of the FN, the policies of LR and the willingness of Macron to govern by decree show that the dominant class knows that to push through its policies, it will have to use increasingly authoritarian and repressive means.

2/ The place of the Front National

Even if it she not achieved her objective, Le pen is present in the second round and begins to polarize beyond her political borders as is evidenced in the rallying of Christine Boutin and Dupont-Aignan. In jumping these barriers and breaking the rule of insulation, the objective, beyond the presidential election, is to make the second round a springboard for the legislative elections, by imposing an FN group in the National Assembly that is capable of having political weight, all the more so in the event of parliamentary instability.

The Front National, with a million more votes than in the presidential elections of 2012, three million more than those of 2002, continues to root itself and strengthen its activist implantation. The vote for Le Pen is in the majority among workers, employees of the public sector and the unemployed who have voted. The FN has deepened its implantation in the north of France where it came first in all the departments of the Hauts-de-France, in rural communes and now also in the medium-sized cities.

The challenge for us before and after the second round is to combat this idea that the National Front should become a party like the others. It is a party of the extreme right whose basis is still the legacy of the fascist FN of Jean Marie Le Pen. Its program is the destruction of democratic rights, the challenging of all the rights of the trade union movement and the social movement. To advance its base in the popular classes affected by capitalist policies, it has demagogically taken up a few social demands such as increasing low wages or retirement at 60, while its economic program is a bosses' program and it develops a program of division of the exploited, aimed at strengthening discrimination against persons of immigrant origin, a program of racist hatred, sparing those really responsible for poverty and unemployment. The FN is a direct threat to the immigrant populations and those of immigrant origin, in the first place refugees. We must therefore both denounce the FN as being also a party of the system, a capitalist

party protecting the capitalists and the banks, but we must also denounce it as the worst enemy of the labour movement, the exploited and the oppressed.

3/ A left in deep crisis

The left, in all its components scored less than 30% and only ten million votes. The parties originating from the workers' movement have been removed from the second round of the election. With a score of 19%, Mélenchon managed to consolidate his candidacy and to appear as the main candidate of the left. He played on several registers: he succeeded in capturing and polarizing the bulk of those who mobilized last year against the El Khomri law and, in general, the bulk of the currents of social mobilization of recent years, incorporating the main demands of these movements. At the same time, he has, like Macron, siphoned off an important part of the electorate of the PS, who saw the possibility of having a candidate of the left in the second round. Also, in the last few weeks, the Mélenchon campaign became increasingly a republican, nationalist, campaign, erasing the most radical aspects and the axes of combat against austerity. It was, at the end of the account, about bringing the radicalism and the revolt against the system of millions of people into an institutional and republican framework.

In any case, by refusing before and during the campaign to build a framework of campaign and democratic convergence, JLM has found himself before a difficulty. The galvanization around his own campaign cannot continue. It will be difficult for him to escape the debate on what happens now, because the need to create a relationship of social and political force will grow. The Keynesian program of Mélenchon, even if it reflected many of the requirements of the social movement, evaded the issue of the necessary confrontation with the employers, of popular mobilization to impose even the program of France Insoumise. The lessons of Greece show that any program against austerity faces, nationally and at the EU level, capitalist interests and the institutions which guarantee them. In addition, the rejection of any democratic and pluralistic construction will reappear with force during the legislative elections with the competitive division of the forces who made the electoral success of JLM (particularly between the candidates of France Insoumise and the PCF, Mélenchon having so far refused any agreement on the distribution of seats). The left of the PS, the PCF, Mélenchon's voters, and NPA sympathizers are therefore facing a common problem, despite the deep differences: the reconstruction of the organized labour movement, of sectors prepared to fight on a daily basis to defend the exploited.

4/ The Campaign of the NPA: elements of reconstruction

Week after week, the candidacy of Philippe Poutou imposed itself in the NPA, around him and in the media. At the end of the campaign, we can say that at the scale of its forces, it was an undeniable success.

In the context of the disrepute of professional politicians and the scandals of Fillon and Le Pen, Philippe Poutou appeared very widely, and all the more so after April 4, as a worker candidate, expressing very loudly the concerns and the resentments of popular classes in relation to the institutional parties.

He also strongly impacted upon public opinion with his denunciation of the FN. The campaign made an impact, more than in 2012, on several political issues: the disarmament of the police, the removal of the privileges of elected representatives, in particular, and to a lesser extent the prohibition of redundancies. In an election which was strongly personalized and focused on media appearances, there was a first phase of marginality, including up to the obtaining of the 500 signatures needed to contest the election. In contrast, the Poutou candidacy benefited from a strong media profile after the great televised debate between the presidential candidates on April 4th. It confirmed that, in a

presidential campaign, enormous efforts bear fruit in the last three weeks. The interventions of Poutou and other spokespersons and the campaign material allowed us to advance other aspects of the program of the NPA, such as climate change, nuclear power and the airport at Notre-Dame-Des-Landes, health issues, discrimination and support for the reception of migrants, the rejection of French military intervention and solidarity in the fight against Bashar Al Assad.

The echo was positive and growing, even if in the final days the shooting on the Champs Elysees put in difficulty the positioning on the question of the disarmament of the police. On the other hand, the campaign was not able to develop other important points of the emergency program of the NPA: the fight against unemployment (sharing of working time, a ban on redundancies, increase in the minimum wage and so on) and the overall project of society. By contrast, the rising pressure for a “useful vote” to take Mélenchon to the second round or even for Macron limited the success of the campaign in strictly electoral terms, of the number of votes. This climate also largely hampered the debate and the expression of positions on the question of the representation of the exploited and oppressed.

Attendance at the meetings reached a peak as did the number of contacts and this has restored a positive dynamic to the militant activity of numerous sections of the NPA. It remains to transform this into an activist force and to maintain a political presence which is audible and visible on a wide scale.

5/ Build the fight against the FN and neoliberal policies

During the campaign the NPA has, in several cities, initiated or been at the heart of mobilizations against the FN, with a broad united front arc and real success in several cities. By contrast, the party was less reactive in those mobilizations which took place in hours and days that followed the outcome of the first round, subject to resignation concerning the presence of FN in the second round and often not having dared, due to the low score and limited legitimacy, to take initiatives.

For the second round on May 7th, what matters is convincing people that the FN is a serious threat to the exploited and their tools of resistance, a threat reinforced by the increased resources of the state of emergency established by exploiting the terrorist attacks. It is essential to fight against any vote in its favour, to say that, in the camp of the exploited, there should not be one vote for Le Pen.

We do not put an equals sign between Macron and Le Pen, although that does not mean advising a vote for Macron. If voting for the latter may reveal illusions in the institutions, abstention can symmetrically reveal an under-estimation of the danger of the FN. On our side, we argue for mobilizations that will reduce the vote FN, reduce the legitimacy of Macron and prepare the fight against the next government. It is logical that the mobilizations target as a priority the FN, which is a deadly enemy of our social camp, but the battle against the FN must not be disconnected from a battle against the neoliberal policies which nurture it, which have been carried out for years by the PS and LR, backed by the European institutions, and will continue with Macron. We want to prepare the labour movement to militantly oppose the policies that the latter will conduct from before the summer. We must fight the FN today, but be aware that five years (or less) of the ultra-neoliberal policies conducted by Macron will only strengthen the far right if at the same time we are not moving forward in the construction of a political expression of the exploited and oppressed which disputes the field with it, opposes racism and competition between the oppressed, and has an emancipatory perspective based on solidarity and the common struggle.

6/ Rebuild the labour movement

One of the balance sheets of this election is the weakness of the weight of the organized labour movement, the setbacks of confidence in collective class action against austerity policies, a loss of confidence and consciousness which benefits the FN. However, the mobilizations of last year against the employment act, those around Notre-Dames-Des-Landes, Guyana, COP21, show that the basis exists to ensure that social mobilizations take on all their political dimension.

It is on this terrain that we will put all our efforts in the weeks and months to come, acting to build and strengthen the tools of collective action, unions, associations, unitary frameworks. It is vital, especially in the current political conditions, that the roots of the NPA are firmly planted in the social movement, in the struggles that our activists have as compasses of formation of collective action, through mobilizations, opposition to institutional pressures, and endeavouring to ensure the convergence of social, ecologist, feminist and internationalist struggles.

7/ Ensure the positive dynamic generated by the campaign

The NPA should, by multiple local initiatives, public meetings, meetings and the preparation of the summer university, stabilize and organize the activist contacts made during the campaign. The workers, the exploited have expressed themselves in various ways in this election. Beyond the foreigners without voting rights, many abstained. Others, too many, have been attracted by Le Pen, seeing this as a popular vote. Others voted Mélenchon, or even Hamon, seeing this as the expression of their struggles, of the demand for social justice. Others have even voted Macron in the first round, seeing in him a bulwark against the FN. The vote for Philippe Poutou recognised the anti-capitalist struggle.

We now have to address all of them; the absence of a party representing the interests of the exploited and oppressed leaves hands free to the enemies of the popular classes. Also, we want to try to gather in the streets and the mobilizations our class, that of the exploited and oppressed, as it is gathered against the El Khomri law, as it mobilized in French Guiana, involving also the small employers and the other intermediary sectors.

But we also want, beyond these struggles, to chart the course of assembling a common political force around an anti-capitalist program, a revolutionary break with capitalism and with its institutions, be they national or European.

We want to discuss this project with all those who seek the path of this necessary gathering, certainly of the constituted organizations or activist groups formed activists, but especially by addressing ourselves, through open meetings of activists in the social movement. The refoundation of a political-social project and ideological alternative to this capitalism which destroys social rights and the environment will only be credible and attractive if it emerges from pluralistic and democratic practices, anchored in the activist networks, rejecting the subordination of social movements to political parties - therefore by inventing a radical redefinition of the "political".