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France

France: The situation in France, the NFP and the tasks of revolutionaries

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The situation in France is marked by the general crisis of capitalism and its place in the international balance of forces. It is currently in a very unstable equilibrium and, like many other countries, could tip over into the domination of the extreme right.

The global economic crisis has hit French capitalism hard. The country is in virtual recession and its budget deficit is growing (6% of GDP in 2024), to such an extent that France's debt rating has been downgraded several times by the rating agencies (from AAA to Aa2 between 2012-2015 then to Aa3 in 2024). One of its traditional sectors, the car industry, is in crisis, unable in particular to make the transition to electric vehicles. The retail sector is shedding thousands of jobs (notably at Auchan and Casino). Overall, for the period from July to November 2024, the CGT trade union federation has identified 120 redundancy plans, representing between 130,000 and 200,000 jobs since September 2023. It is possible that the actual figures are much higher, if we take into account induced jobs. These job cuts include outright redundancies and retirements that have not been replaced, leading to an increase in the workload. Poverty is also on the rise, with 8.1% of the population living in poverty (on less than €1,000 a month, or €1,500 for a couple without children).

The Barnier and Bayrou governments have implemented drastic budget cuts in public spending, to the tune of 60 billion euros, and various public services are in great difficulty. This is the case in education, even though the job cuts planned in the 2025 budget have been postponed, in health (several deaths have been recorded in hospitals because of the slow pace of treatment or lack of staff), in local public services where job cuts are making it increasingly difficult to manage local authorities, in universities, and so on. Not to mention the creeping privatisation of the SNCF and RATP rail networks, which is gradually taking place, with opening up to competition and then the sale of lines.

The imperialist reaction to the difficulties

The trend is therefore towards a very marked economic decline. At the same time, French imperialism has been routed in most of the African countries it had dominated in its modern form of imperialism, *Françafrique*. In Mali (February 2022), Burkina Faso (February 2023), Niger (late 2023), Côte d'Ivoire (February 2025), Chad (December 2024) and Senegal (September 2025), France has had to withdraw its troops, and its economic and political interests are being called into question. These withdrawals have taken place at the initiative of the regimes, either because of the discontent of the populations or because of the emergence of competing influences, in particular from Russia and China.

In response, France is continuing or even strengthening its domination over its remaining colonies. Macron is attempting to halt the process of decolonisation in Kanaky by holding the third referendum in 2021, despite Covid, trying to unfreeze the electorate and deporting activists to mainland France. He has responded with repression to social demands in Guadeloupe, Martinique and French Guiana, while Mayotte is now being used as a full-scale test case for racist policies, with the abolition of *droit du sol*, which allowed anyone born in France to obtain French nationality.

More generally, the world's 7th largest military power is seeking to build a 'European defence' around itself. For example, the country's next military programming law is expected to cost €413 billion over 5 years, a doubling in 10 years, while Macron says he wants 'massive joint European funding to buy and produce more'.

Erosion of traditional parties

The crisis is therefore widespread, and traditional bourgeois governments are having great difficulty in resolving it. Over the last twenty years or so, the right-wing parties born of Gaullism and social democracy have alternated in power, but with increasing difficulty in reproducing themselves. The Parti socialiste (PS) took a particularly right-wing turn under the presidency of François Hollande (2012-2017), adding to the economic liberalism already initiated by Lionel Jospin in the late 1990s, an increase in repression and racist policies, continued destruction of social security, particularly through pension reforms and reforms against the unemployed, and attacks on employment law and trade union representation. But the electoral scores of the right-wing party, Les Républicains, and the PS have been gradually reduced, with François Fillon dropping to 3rd place in 2017 and Valérie Pécresse's very low score (4.78%) in 2022 for the former, and even lower scores for the PS candidates Benoît Hamon (6%) and Anne Hidalgo (1.75%). While Marine Le Pen reached 21% in 2017 and 23% in 2022; and Jean-Luc Mélenchon 20% in 2017 and 22% in 2022.

Macron, a former minister under Hollande, has succeeded in bringing together moderate voters from the classic right and those furthest to the right of the PS, and has emerged victorious from the last two presidential elections. But his base is very limited, with 18% and 20% of registered voters in the first round in 2017 and 2022. And it is tending to shrink even further: in the last parliamentary elections, the alliance built around Macron won only 26% of the vote and 43% of the deputies in 2022, then 22% of the vote and 29% of the deputies in 2024. In fact, its social base is essentially made up of the very upper strata of the workforce (managers), and the ruling class. Reactionary sectors are increasingly turning to the right, to Éric Zemmour, Éric Ciotti and of course Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement national (RN), while the union of the left in the last parliamentary elections caused it to lose the intermediary layers who traditionally voted PS, who have returned to the fold.

In both 2017 and 2022, Macron was elected in the second round of the presidential election against Marine Le Pen and therefore brought into full play the 'republican front', which consists of parties calling for people to vote against the far right. Macron has therefore always appeared to the intermediary layers as the best tool, from the first round onwards, to prevent Le Pen from coming to power. Indeed, much of his campaigning has focused on this theme, promising to roll back the far right. But this promise was short-lived, with the popular classes increasingly abandoning the Macron vote in favour of Mélenchon for the conscious and/or racialised strata, and Le Pen for the strata fearing a worsening of their position.

An ever more concrete fascist danger

So the 'centre' is shrinking, to the benefit of a changing left and the far right. It is the far right that is experiencing particularly spectacular growth, as the 'Republican front' is no longer enough to halt its development: in 39 constituencies (out of 577) in the 2024 parliamentary elections, RN candidates were even elected in the first round.

What's more, there has been a frightening increase in support for the RN in the police and the army. Support in the police has risen from 51% in 2015 to 67% in the lower echelons of the hierarchy in 2022, and in the army it is estimated to be over 50%. They are, in effect, armed gangs sympathetic to the far right. This should be seen in the context of the article by 20 generals published on 21 April 2021 - in reference to the attempted putsch by the generals in 1961 - in the far-right magazine *Valeurs actuelles* stating that 'Yes, if a civil war breaks out, the army will maintain order on its own soil'. [\[1\]](#)

And with the fact that significant sections of the French bourgeoisie have tilted towards the far right. For example, "François Asselin, head of the Confederation of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (CPME), uses a survey

commissioned by his organisation to assert that ‘the Ras-semblement National is less frightening to entrepreneurs than the New Popular Front’”. Michel Picon, President of the Union des entreprises de proximité (U2P), for his part, believes that small business owners ‘express a strong need for order, firmness and the re-establishment of a hierarchy of values’. [2] Right wing business figures like Bolloré and Proglia are on the rise, while the *Financial Times* has noted that ‘the bosses of France's big companies are rushing to make contacts with Marine Le Pen's far right’.

Attacks by fascist groups against racialised people, LGBTI people, picket lines and activist meetings are gradually increasing. In February, a left-wing activist was stabbed, fortunately without serious injury. And the far right has taken an important place in some social mobilisations such as the Gilets jaunes and farmers' mobilisations, notably through the Coordination rurale, which is experiencing significant growth (rising from 3 to 14 presidencies of chambers of agriculture between 2019 and 2025, with scores above 30% in many departments).

Many of the characteristics of fascism are already in place in the country. One essential point is missing: the existence of a mass fascist party. But this element is, alas, achievable, given the impressive queues at Jordan Bardella's book signings or the presence at RN rallies.

A reconfigured left

On the other side of the political spectrum, the left is changing radically. As we have seen, the PS, hegemonic on the left for thirty years, is very much weakened and plagued by strong contradictions. It claims 50,000 members but fewer than 20,000 people vote at its conventions. And it is riven by major disagreements between a fringe that is completely integrated into the institutions and is seeking to move closer to Macron (around Carole Delga, Anne Hidalgo, Michael Delafosse and so on) and another that remains sensitive to the history of the workers' movement, particularly through elected representatives from popular neighbourhoods or trade unionists from the CFDT, UNSA or FO federations.

The unity of the left in the 2022 and 2024 general elections was imposed on its organisations because, divided, they would have had very few elected members. But we cannot ignore the correlation between, on the one hand, the unity achieved with the NUPES (Nouvelle Union populaire écologique et social) in 2022 and the NFP (Nouveau front populaire) in 2024, and, on the other hand, the trade union unity in the face of the attack on pensions in 2023, which brought together all the forces, from Solidaires to the CFDT, via the FSU and the main union federation, the CGT. We can consider that, under the impact of the anti-social attacks in one case, and the threat of the right and extreme right in the second, the organisations of the proletariat came together, at the same time as the proletariat was trying to organise itself and take action, exerting pressure for this gathering.

Under this pressure, the PS, as had already been the case when Benoît Hamon was nominated in 2017, adopted a relatively combative orientation, and accepted the programme of the NFP, which is on most points a reworking of that of La France insoumise, itself inspired by the demands of the major social movements, formulated by activists from the main organisations in all fields (trade unions, educational associations, groups of economists and so on). Les Écologistes and the Communist Party also took part in the alliance. These two organisations, not having been at the head of the social-liberal governments, have a greater ability to adapt their programmes than the PS, and the negotiations were rapid.

The core of the political agreement between the four major left-wing formations was the demand to withdraw the 2023 pension reform and that, in the event of victory, the NFP would choose which prime minister it would propose to Macron, and would vote motions of no confidence against any right-wing prime minister. This fragile agreement, which the PS has called into question in recent months, was imposed on the party's right in exchange for a

significant share of the constituencies for the parliamentary elections, one of which was even awarded to former president François Hollande.

An original united front

On the other side of the left, the NPA-L'Anticapitaliste (NPA-A) took part in the NFP, obtaining 'on the LFI quota' a constituency that was unwinnable for Philippe Poutou. [3]

The only condition for the NPA-A's entry into the NFP was a commitment to vote for the NFP's programme in the Assembly if Philippe was elected; it was clearly specified by the NPA-A that it would not participate in the NFP government. In fact, the nature of the NFP, this alliance 'from Philippe Poutou to François Hollande', does not allow revolutionaries to participate, which can only happen in exceptional circumstances.

The NFP claims to have a programme for breaking with the past which includes some fairly radical proposals: freezing 'the prices of essential goods such as food, energy and fuel', taxing 'super profits', increasing wages, 'a moratorium on major motorway infrastructure projects', 'moving to a 6th Republic by convening an elected constituent assembly of citizens', measures that are more favourable to immigration, rejection of the European 'budgetary stability pact', a huge number of measures which, without being revolutionary, constitute a real break with the bourgeois policies pursued for decades and presuppose a confrontation with the bourgeoisie.

Such a programme is totally unacceptable and the ruling class, through its media, its political representatives and major business leaders, has expressed its total opposition to this programme and to La France insoumise. Some of them have even taken up phrases akin to the historic 'better Hitler than the Popular Front'. However, the objectives of an NFP government would be within the framework of the system and would bring together currents that have loyally participated in the management of French capitalism, including members of the PS, the PCF and the Ecologists. The programme, while not really containing any erroneous measures, does not deal with redundancies or public debt, and does not introduce any incursion into private ownership of the means of production. It's a safe bet that a government based on this programme would be put under pressure and disciplined even more quickly than the Syriza government in Greece and, even if LFI repeats over and over again that it wants to rely on mobilisations - if it doesn't work to build them - the current low level of self-activity among the working classes would make it quite unlikely that the government would be overrun by its left.

Containing the retreat, preparing the counter-offensive

All this remains rather hypothetical, precisely because the balance of power between the classes does not, at this stage, allow us to hope for an electoral victory for the left. In fact, the workers' movement is going through a phase of decline in its ability to influence the situation. The mobilisation on pensions in 2023 ended in defeat, while the rights of the unemployed and foreigners have been eroded without any real opposition from the major organisations. The break-up and privatisation of public services is continuing, with very limited and local reactions for the time being. Trade union deserts are growing, and the prospects of a unification - in the medium term - between the CGT and the FSU (or even Solidaires) would serve more to contain the retreat than to hope for reconstruction.

However, there are points of support. The movement on pensions has shown the depth of the possibilities, with record participation in demonstrations (at their peak, one million demonstrators according to the police, 3.5 million

according to the CGT), which took place in several hundred towns. Following the example of previous movements, or the mobilisation of the Gilets jaunes in 2018-2019, we were able to observe that the potential for mobilisation of the working class remains very significant even if, in terms of the balance of forces relative to that imposed by the ruling class, it is insufficient.

Other mobilisations have taken place, showing varying capacities: for example, the movement against police and racist violence, following the murder of a young man, Nahel, by the police, in June 2023, which mobilised popular neighbourhoods for several days, despite bans on demonstrations and police repression (3,651 people arrested and 380 prison sentences, and two deaths). Unlike the revolts of 2005, this movement was generally supported by the left. The mobilisation for Palestine, despite facing repression and a large-scale ideological offensive, has managed to hold out over the long term and mobilise tens of thousands of people for a time, particularly from popular and racialised neighbourhoods. It represented the most important internationalist youth movement - particularly from popular neighbourhoods - for several decades. Action was taken against redundancies and job cuts, particularly in the car and retail industries, in November 2024 and, although it did not win the day, it did help to destabilise the Barnier government and ensure that the attempt to pass the budget using Article 49-3 of the Constitution led to the censure and resignation of the government. Feminist protests, which have become a regular feature since Metoo with the development of the feminist strike, and environmental protests (notably against unnecessary major projects such as motorways, mega-pools and so on), are also contributing to overall social protest. Today, we're seeing trade union action against budget austerity in local authorities, universities (with several hundred people in some general meetings to date), hospitals and schools.

Activist unity

So there is a crisis and almost permanent mobilisation in reaction to the government's attacks and, in a similar way, part of the left - in reaction to the rise of the far right and in the face of Macron - has mobilised to build the NFP campaign, in local committees each bringing together several dozen people - even hundreds on some occasions. In many constituencies, all the left-wing activists got together to organise leafleting, poster-posting, building tours and public meetings. Not just political activists, but also trade unionists and members of left-wing associations.

This dynamic has undeniable qualities. The mere fact of taking part in joint actions over a period of several weeks almost automatically generates a tenfold increase in capacity for action - which not only meant that the RN did not win the elections, but also that the NFP is the force with the largest number of MPs in the National Assembly! - and is exerting pressure to continue this unity in the struggles. In fact, it is obvious to any grassroots activist that there is a link between the elements of the programme and the struggles at grassroots level, between the concerns of the working classes and the actions to be taken, even if a large proportion of the activists see them in their less combative aspects (meetings with elected representatives, petitions and so on), and it was absolutely essential, for revolutionary activists, to support this global dynamic, despite the limited combativeness of these cadres.

This last point is linked to the NFP's major weakness, its essentially institutional nature, in the sense that it is linked to the institutions of capitalism, from the bottom up. Its struggle is essentially a struggle within the system, to change the balance and 'pursue a left-wing policy'. The NFP campaigned for the post of prime minister and for the government, even though it only won a third of the seats. La France insoumise, the most radical of the NFP's four main organisations, initiated impeachment proceedings against Macron, which had no chance of success and was in no way part of a mass movement, despite the fact that the president is hated by a large part of the population. In the final vote on the budget, the PS did not vote for censure, contrary to the NFP's initial commitments. [\[4\]](#) This choice, which responded to the concerns of a section of the population who feared further destabilisation of the country if the budget was not adopted, enabled the Rassemblement national, which did not wish to censure the government either, to position itself favourably. Indeed, the RN is playing a complex game: on the one hand it is trying to present itself as

the main opponent of Macron and on the other to appear as a credible force to manage the system in his place. This approach is full of contradictions, and the left could, by systematically voting for censure and positioning itself as the main activist anti-Macron force, demonstrate that the RN is not at the service of the popular classes.

But for this to happen, the left would have to undertake combative grassroots activist campaigns, which it is not prepared to do, as it is allowing itself to be absorbed by parliamentary work, divisions and in particular those linked to preparations for the municipal elections that will take place in 2026. For the left-wing parties that are most integrated into the system, this is a fundamental deadline for maintaining their positions, which enable them - like their positions in the regional and departmental councils - to build up their apparatus and maintain a balance of power in relation to LFI, which remains much weaker on this terrain. What's more, each left-wing organisation is looking ahead to the next presidential election in 2027, hoping to play a central role. LFI through Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who is likely to run, while the other forces are keen to avoid the former senator becoming the sole candidate of the left at all costs, as this would reduce their balance of power vis-à-vis LFI. Each force is under enormous pressure: the need to present a single, joint candidacy in order to win, and perhaps even to prevent Le Pen from being elected. To this puzzle we must add the possibility, if the Bayrou government does not hold up over time, particularly if it is censured by the left and the RN, of new parliamentary elections as early as June 2025. Suffice to say that the left is paralysed by these issues, which divide it while requiring its unity.

Combining unity and radicalism

It's hard to make an impact in a situation like this, because things seem to be at a standstill in both the political and social arenas. For the time being, social mobilisations are not very powerful, despite the scale of the attacks, and political organisations are bogged down in negotiations and harmful local confrontations. However, periods when there is a big gap between what is needed and what is actually done can be times when there is political space to express an alternative direction, when what is needed must be transformed into what is possible through political work.

To do this, we need to try to analyse the precise issues at stake and mobilise the forces available to influence them. This attempt leads us to distinguish three levels of political necessity.

The first is the need for unity across the left to respond to the fascist threat, to build a balance of power and to map out alternative perspectives to bourgeois domination. That's why, despite the limitations of the NFP, it was right to participate in it and to make the link between this alliance and concrete struggles. It also seems right to continue to build this framework at grassroots level, in particular by encouraging the dozens of collectives that continue to exist locally. Allies (Nouvelle donne, Égalités, l'Après, Copernic, Peps and so on) exist for such an orientation, who are working to build a national meeting of collectives, where the four main organisations (LFI, PS, PCF, ecologists) are prioritising their interests. When the time comes, this policy could play an important role because it is an embryo of unitary grassroots democratic frameworks, which every mass movement needs in order to act, build itself and raise the question of power from below.

These grassroots collectives can set up the unitary campaigns needed in the current period: against racist policies, against redundancies, for wage increases, for the defence of public services, for Palestine, for Kanaky and so on. Initial discussions have taken place, at the initiative of the NPA-A, on redundancies during the wave of job cuts in November-December 2023 and initiatives for public services are being discussed. They could also intervene in more general political debates, for example on the budget and censorship, and challenge the government.

In addition, a new debate is about to begin on pensions, and it will be essential to build an inter-union front and a

united campaign by the NFP and the social movement to defend them.

Defending unity from the bottom up could also involve, and this cannot be ruled out, defending a single left-wing candidacy for the presidential elections. Indeed, under the Fifth Republic, which is particularly undemocratic and gives immense powers to the president, avoiding a Le Pen victory could require a single left-wing candidacy. But the die is far from cast. The sequence of municipal elections in 2026 is a difficult stage to anticipate at the moment: we don't know whether the division of the left will provoke a new advance by the far right, or whether a unity of the left will be achieved and under what conditions and what balance of power.

The special position of LFI

The second level stems from an analysis of the various left-wing organisations. In recent years, it has become apparent that LFI plays a special role among them: its relatively low level of institutional integration (it has no regional councillors and 6 departmental councillors, compared with 40 for the PCF, which lost 81 in the last elections, and 332 for the PS, which lost 622) means that it is partly critical of the established order. Its electoral strategy is also to rely on the popular neighbourhoods, particularly those which are racialised, and it fights racism, Islamophobia and the RN more head-on than the other left-wing forces. On Palestine, it has expressed solidarity with the Palestinian people, notably in the Assembly, in stark contrast to the positions of the rest of the left (two MPs waved a Palestinian flag, others drew the flag according to the colour of their clothes). It is also the youngest and most dynamic force in the NFP.

There is no shortage of criticisms to be made of LFI, including its lack of internal democracy, its sectarianism towards other political forces and trade unions, its chauvinist traditions, its very statist approach and the weakness of its proposals in terms of incursions into private property. What's more, its desire to become hegemonic on the left is accompanied by highly sectarian tendencies towards other organisations. But it is clear that this force constitutes an immense point of support on the left, in terms of both programme and activists.

Building a united and revolutionary left

The third level is the need to unite revolutionary forces. In the sequence that has lasted from the 2022 presidential election to the fall of the Barnier government, via the strike on pensions, discussions have multiplied on the left. From these discussions emerged a pole made up of different groups defending similar general orientations on many points: the need for unity of the left, the building of NFP collectives at grassroots level, but also an independent orientation, particularly on social struggles and Ukraine. Numerous discussions have taken place between the NPA-A, Ensemble!, the Gauche écosocialiste, the neighbourhood collective 'On s'en mêle', the militant collective Égalités and so on. These exchanges have not led to the construction of a new organisation, mainly because of differences over how to articulate unity and independence, even if relations remain regular.

However, the emergence of a united revolutionary left is a necessity in the coming period. It is very likely that there will be new mass social confrontations, both in social struggles and in elections. In these shocks, a truly unitary orientation, which is not a prisoner of factional interests, will have to be put forward, as will an orientation whose centre of gravity lies in the extra-parliamentary social struggles to overthrow the power of the bourgeoisie.

To achieve this, it will be essential to intervene in the struggles, but also in the debates on the left, even the most difficult ones. An organisation is judged by its ability to answer the questions posed by the working classes in the face

of major national political problems, and it is through the possibility of answering them together that the prospects for militant unity are tested.

PS:

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[1] 'La tribune des généraux, l'armée et la Cinquième République', Claude Serfati, *Contretemps*, May 2021.

[2] 'Le patronat passe-t-il à l'extrême droite ?', Maxime Combes, *Basta*, 5 July 2024.

[3] In France, supporters of the Fourth International are active in the NPA-A, the NPA-Révolutionnaires (which opposed the NFP and presented its own candidates), the Gauche écosocialiste (a current of La France insoumise, many of whose activists have been expelled or have left it since the last parliamentary elections), Après (an organisation set up by MPs Hendrik Davi, Clémentine Autain and Alexis Corbière after they were expelled from La France insoumise along with François Ruffin and Raquel Garrido) and Ensemble!.

[4] This discussion took place between November 2024 - when Barnier was forced to resign following the use of Article 49-3 of the Constitution, which led to censure by left-wing MPs and the RN - and February 2025, when the new Prime Minister François Bayrou succeeded in passing a budget using 49-3, resisting censure thanks to abstentions from the PS and RN.