

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article8842>



France

“Unity and radicality”

- IV Online magazine - 2025 - IVP601- February 2025 -

Publication date: Sunday 2 February 2025

Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights reserved

Former presidential candidate Olivier Besancenot talks about the state of France's ‘New Popular Front’ to Raul Zelik.

You were one of the best-known left-wing politicians of the 2000s, then went back to work as a postman. Rather atypical for a politician, isn't it?

I never stopped working as a postman. During election campaigns, I was able to take two months off, but otherwise I kept my job. In our organization, there is no post of general secretary, treasurer or anything else.

In opinion polls in France, Marine Le Pen of the ‘Rassemblement National’ is regularly in the lead. Does she belong to the same liberal economic line as Trump, Meloni and Milei, or are there differences?

Marine Le Pen undoubtedly belongs to this authoritarian neo-fascist movement. Admittedly, she presents herself in a slightly more social way than the AfD in Germany, but that's for tactical reasons. When the population fought against raising the retirement age, Le Pen became a little less economically liberal. But she soon changed her mind. I'd say she's adapting to public opinion.

Neo-liberal economic policy, racist police violence, neo-colonialism in Africa and Oceania - all this is already happening today under President Macron. What would get even worse under Le Pen?

First and foremost, repression in poor neighbourhoods would increase further. Racism and Islamophobia are at the root of the far right - something that is closely linked to France's colonial history. And this development is of course not just linked to election results. It is a process that we have been observing for many years and to which Macron's policies have largely contributed.

With the creation of the New Popular Front last year, a counter-movement against the right has finally seen the light of day. What distinguishes the Nouveau Front Populaire (NFP) from previous left-wing alliances in which your organization was not involved?

There are two differences: firstly, last year everyone saw the need to block the extreme right. Secondly, the NFP was more than an electoral association between the parties. Of course, the agreements between the party leaderships were the condition of its existence, but the Popular Front was also supported by social movements and trade unions. For example, the feminist organization Planning familial, the Jewish anti-colonial platform Tsedek!, ATTAC and local trade union committees. It was like a social magma. No left-wing electoral alliance in recent decades could compare with this project.

After the majority of social-democrat MPs voted for the conservative prime minister Bayrou in December, the alliance has already shattered. What does this mean for the anti-fascist resistance?

In some places there are still local NFP groups, but yes: overall, the alliance has collapsed. The responsibility for this lies with the leaderships of the left-wing parties - socialists, communists, ecologists and partly also France Insoumise. They needed the Popular Front to win constituencies in the parliamentary elections. But they were clearly not that interested in social mobilization.

What lies behind the PS's decision to withdraw from the alliance? Was it the classic 'social-democratic betrayal' - or a more complex issue?

It was obviously more complex. Social democracy did what it always does: it entered into an alliance with a party of the state apparatus so as not to have to be reformist. Reformism would mean wresting social and ecological change from the 'market economy'. On the other hand, the disintegration of the NFP is linked to the French presidential system. Although the left won the elections, President Macron was able to appoint a man from the right to head the government. And now everyone - including the left - is under the illusion that a victory in the presidential elections would solve the big problems. That's why 'La France Insoumise' and the PS are doing everything they can to put forward their candidates Jean-Luc Mélenchon and François Hollande. The advantage in France, however, is that there is a vibrant extra-parliamentary movement, as the Gilets jaunes protests or the fight against pension reform have shown.

From the outside, La France insoumise has evolved. Mélenchon's party has succeeded in making migrant and anti-racist positions much more visible than before.

Yes, I would say that the party has shown that it has solid backing. The big media groups, such as billionaire Vincent Bolloré's CNews news channel, stir up hatred of Arabs and the left. It is on this axis that the right-wing movement in France is now operating. And La France Insoumise has not given in to this fundamental movement, but has become more radical on certain issues - Palestine and Islamophobia, for example. It was different a few years ago, when France Insoumise defended debates as statist as those of the left in Germany. However, I see a problem in the fact that here too, everything is focused on early presidential elections. It's obvious that the crisis is far too deep and the right far too strong for new elections to pave the way for a solution.

What could be the strategy for halting the Right's triumphant march?

Above all, we must not despair. That may sound silly, but it's important. Last June, we saw in France that the tide could turn. A week before the second round, a victory for the 'new popular front' was still totally unimaginable. But it succeeded - because there was a political programme that was certainly not revolutionary, but which contained concrete social improvements. For me, this shows that we must actively combine unity and radicalism. It's difficult, but there is no alternative. One encouraging development in France is the tactical and strategic debates that are taking place all over the place - in neighbourhoods, trade unions, internationalist, feminist and LGBTI movements. Many of these relationships were unimaginable until recently. We need to understand that this is an open historical moment.

31 January 2025

Translated by **International Viewpoint** from " class="spip_out" rel="external">**Inprecor**, translated from the German [nd](#)..

PS:

If you like this article or have found it useful, please consider donating towards the work of International Viewpoint. Simply follow this link: [Donate](#) then enter an amount of your choice. One-off donations are very welcome. But regular donations by standing order are also vital to our continuing functioning. See the last paragraph of [this article](#) for our bank account details and take out a standing order. Thanks.