French elections: A New Electoral Union on the French Left

After several weeks of negotiations, mainly with the Greens and the Socialist Party, **writes Leon Crémieux**, La France Insoumise, the left wing organisation led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon, has sealed an electoral alliance for the coming French parliamentary elections on 12th and 19th June which will choose the 577 deputies of the National Assembly.

The NUPES ("Nouvelle union populaire, écologique et sociale" – New Popular, Ecological and Social Union) will therefore bring together La France Insoumise, the Greens (EELV), the Communist Party (PCF) and the Socialist Party (PS). The guiding principle is a single candidacy of this alliance in all electoral districts (except the overseas departments and Corsica). Obviously, this agreement was imposed on the partners of La France Insoumise, given the balance of power resulting from the presidential election and the risk that these parties would be marginalized again in the National Assembly.

On the other hand, La France Insoumise and Mélenchon wanted to seek the widest possible agreement on the left, pursuing the prospect of obtaining a parliamentary majority and the post of Prime Minister. Also, they have redoubled their efforts for this, and to guarantee the agreement and prevent EELV and the PS from presenting alternative candidates, by "buying" their adhesion. While the France Insoumise had initially spoken of a proportional distribution (according to the result of the presidential election) of the candidacies, which would have given 29 for the PS, 38 for the PC, 78 for EELV, the latest proposals have greatly inflated the figures for the PS and EELV which obtain respectively 70 and 100 candidates, with 50

for the PCF, which nevertheless achieved a better result than the PS). But the challenge, especially in relation to the PS, was to be sure that the agreement would have a majority in the party's National Council and that there would be little chance of a dissident list. Thus, the 19 outgoing deputies of the PS will be candidates for the NUPS.

Given the electoral system for these parliamentary elections (single-member with two rounds) union around a single candidate in the first round is necessary for the election of a large number of deputies. Without an agreement, La France Insoumise would have obtained a maximum of around fifty deputies.

No one is fooled by the sudden conversion of the PS to the political positions of La France Insoumise, but the PS apparatus, at least the part that is not rallying to a Macronist majority in the assembly, considered that between Macron and Mélenchon, the future of the party was rather to be played on the left. The same was true for EELV.

To obtain its Union, La France Insoumise has therefore, in the name of electoral "realpolitik" in relation to EELV and the PS, chosen to reduce its electoral program, on retirement at full rate at 60, disobeying the treaties of the European Union, and even on immediately increasing the minimum wage to 1,400 euros, in particular. Similarly, the idea of opening up to activist groupings from working-class neighbourhoods within the framework of the new union has been more than limited. Finally, La France Insoumise has never sought to give the Nouveau parti anticapitaliste (NPA) the place, small but real, to which a unitary logic entitled it. Thus, La France Insoumise did not envisage in any way the possibility that Philippe Poutou would be a candidate in a constituency where he could have been electable, let alone run in Bordeaux in continuation of a common political activity with France Insoumise since the municipal and regional elections.

And finally, alongside the gifts made to the PS which obtained 3 times more candidates than its electoral weight, France Insoumise offered the NPA only 5 candidates (3 times less than its electoral weight) and without much hope of electability … Quite a symbol.

The NPA, which maintained to the end a framework of negotiations with the will to reach an agreement, was therefore confronted with negotiators who did not, in fact, make any serious proposal to the NPA either on programme or candidacies, except to put the acronym of the NPA in an alliance framework in which it did not politically exist. As Philippe Poutou said, “the NPA understood that in the end, its presence was not really desired by La France Insoumise”.

Nevertheless, the NPA will continue to be in the framework of the dynamics that have emerged in recent weeks, trying to stimulate and participate in unitary activist frameworks. As the statement issued by its National Political Council says, the NPA will call for a vote and actively support those NUPES candidates representing a left of rupture. In other constituencies, faced with the candidacies of social liberals, notably the PS, but under the NUPES label, the NPA will seek to make an alternative heard with unitary candidates, from the world of labour and popular neighbourhoods, representing a fighting left, independent of the institutions and social-liberalism.

The rejection the NPA has suffered shows that the France Insoumise is playing all its cards on the institutional side and that of social-compatible moderation while many activist currents want a logic aimed at organizing a unitary mobilization and organization from below. But this does not call into question the analysis of the objective place that this electoral alliance has in the political field.

No one really knows what the electoral impact of this union will be, but the NUPES is clearly becoming the main electoral

threat to a majority supporting Macron in the Assembly. This will clearly exceed the cursors of the political debate in the next six weeks.

Until now, Macron has built his image as a bulwark against the extreme right, against his best enemy Marine Le Pen, playing on the anti-fascist instincts of the traditional left electorate. This logic will be totally destabilized. According to initial projections, a majority of second-round duels would pit an En Marche candidacy against an NUPES candidacy.

Also, in recent days, across the media and from En Marche, all the blows are targeting Mélenchon and the new Union. Many politicians deplore the PS scuttling itself by allying with Mélenchon, they would have preferred it to scuttle itself by joining Macron. So, the limited but real risk that the left will become the main opposition to Macron and could even deprive him of a majority really frightens the presidential majority.

There is currently no split in the PS, but a dissident current will clearly organize itself with candidates opposed to the NUPES in some constituencies.

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Reproduced from International Viewpoint, English-language magazine of the Fourth International, 11 May 2022: https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article7651