

In France Macron helps fanatics and socialists fight authentic Right

By Conrad Black

It was a widespread assumption that French president Emmanuel Macron called the unnecessary parliamentary elections in June and July on the assumption that the Rassemblement National (RN) of Marine Le Pen would win and he would then have the three years that remain in his presidential term to torment the government and improve the chances of his own party winning the next presidential election, which he is term-limited from contesting himself.



Macron must admit Le Pen is the authentic leader of the legitimate and traditional French Right (Photo by Christian Liewig - Corbis/Corbis via Getty Images)

Whether this was the strategy or not, the result of the election was to put the left-wing coalition of parties, the New Popular Front (NFP), with the almost nihilistically

extreme France Unbowed (La France Insoumise) Party principal among them, in as the largest parliamentary force. Thus came after an extraordinary agreement of joint withdrawals between the president's party, Ensemble, and the NFP to sandbag the populist conservative RN. The French system provides for a second election between the two front-runners where there is no majority on the first ballot, but withdrawals of first and second candidates in tactical exchanges between parties for the second ballot are permitted.

The final result on July 7 gave the far-left coalition of Socialists, communists, greens, and France Unbowed parties 180 members of the National Assembly, to 159 for Macron's Ensemble Party, to 142 for the Rassemblement National. There were also 39 more or less conservative Republicans. The manoeuvring for the second round of the election between the top two contenders did reduce the RN from being, by a considerable margin, the leading party in the first round to only the third in the final round in elected deputies, but this required a great deal of dubious horse-trading and featured such spectacles as having some of Macron's senior party colleagues ardently campaigning for the election of a communist representative from the port city of Le Havre.

In negotiations over the last several weeks, the president has tried to crack the solidarity of the NFP and induce the Socialists to join his own followers and the Republicans in a comparatively centrist coalition, but has so far failed to break up the solidarity of the NFP which his own partisans did so much to elevate. Macron's Ensemble coalition withdrew 82 candidates from the second round of voting and the NFP withdrew 134, all in support of the other party and thus denied the NR the victory that it won in the popular vote, winning the largest number of votes by significant margin in both the first and second rounds.

The simple fact is that the NFP is a pantomime horse of vintage French theatre-of-the-absurd anarchists and single-

issue fanatics with an accompanying escort of somewhat more presentable and routine socialists. No such coalition would be capable of governing France coherently and to the extent that it could, as an intact coalition, influence government it would be an agent for esoteric quixotry and outright chaos.

The principal fact of the current disorganised French political condition is that it is time to end the pretence that the RN is an extreme organisation that no respectable political movement can cooperate with successfully. It is time that Marine Le Pen, who inherited her position from her father, whom she subsequently expelled from the party as a Holocaust denier, received some recognition for her successful work in moving the party from a redneck Poujadist angry bourgeois party to a sensible, nationalist populist conservative party that is considerably better house-trained than most of the left.

President Macron must realise that as his Ensemble alliance is entirely dedicated to him and he cannot run again for president, that it is going to vanish entirely in the chasm between the left and the RN if he does not now sponsor it in an alliance which will preserve the party that he founded. (For the uninitiated, it should be kept in mind that French political parties come and go, merge and divorce, and change their names with astounding frequency and none of the three present principal parties existed under the same name a decade ago.)

Effectively, there is a Gaullist, nationalist, conservative bloc of voters, who, unlike Anglo-Saxon conservatives are not necessarily particularly capitalistic as France still clings somewhat to the Richelieu-Colbert (17th century) concept of an extensive government influence in the private sector. Opposing this, there is a social democratic bloc of voters that can sometimes ally itself with the Gaullists and sometimes with communists for the purposes of government. There is the smaller group of traditional moderate conservative Republicans

and the French far Left, although the communists have been beaten down and constantly outmanoeuvred by the socialists, especially by the late President François Mitterrand. The far Left in France, and by Anglo-Saxon standards it is very far Left, is almost never more than 20 or much below 15 per cent of the total.

Whether Macron or the Left like it or not, Marine Le Pen is now the authentic leader of the legitimate and traditional French Right. Her party is not extreme in any respect and while an incumbent president and a reactive and rather vital Left, led in fact by the engaging but politically insane Jean-Luc Mélenchon, succeeded in outmanoeuvring the RN last month, it is the largest political formation in France and in the next presidential election the RN will either be unstoppable, or stoppable only by an unholy and incredible embrace between incompatible political units which, if successful, would for the first time bring the Fifth Republic to a point of incoherence disturbingly reminiscent of the Third and Fourth Republics.

Without Macron at its head, Ensemble would not be representing anyone and would vanish in the vortex between Mélenchon's fun house Marxist dream of a Sixth Republic, and Le Pen's now reasonably-palatable and much-retreaded populist Right. The litmus test of these matters in France is the obligatory retirement age which Macron raised from 62 to 64, for the unexceptionable motive of wishing to avoid the bankruptcy of the pension system. The Left wishes to take it back to 60 and below and Le Pen would settle for a retrenchment to 62 (which would be irresponsible).

Macron's fetishistic pursuit of barring the door to Le Pen would be better replaced by organising an informal coalition of his own followers with Le Pen while he still has a slightly larger parliamentary party than she does. Whatever the vagaries of the French Right, they are a delightful sojourn in mature political science compared to the tenebrous thickets of

the French Left, which is infested with outright political lunatics. It is time for a change and there is no reason to wait three years for the people to enact it.

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