

France's new pro-Macron legislature: the ruling class in office

By Francis Dubois
21 June 2017

Since Emmanuel Macron's victory in the French presidential elections and the historic collapse of the Socialist Party (PS) in the presidential and legislative elections, the media are insisting that a great transition is taking place from the PS to Macron's The Republic on the March (LREM). In this narrative, the old left around the PS is giving way to a new "Start-up Nation" governed by Macron.

"It is my absolute sadness. I am 66 years old and I have the feeling that everything I've done in my life is damaged, broken, everything I've believed in," lamented PS heavyweight and Lille mayor Martine Aubry during the legislative campaign.

She was not speaking about the social and industrial devastation of the Lille region, for which the PS is largely responsible, but the fact that the election would benefit supposedly new politicians from LREM and not the PS: "I don't know how to speak to the French people anymore. But look who you are dealing with!... The little newbies around Macron who were just chosen on a lark or because they are friends, is that better than left-wing people who have been fighting for five years? It makes me sick!"

And last week, at the VivaTech conference in Paris, Macron insisted that during his presidency, France would take on new life, along the lines of a young tech company: "I want France to be a nation of start-ups, a nation which thinks and acts like a start-up."

This narrative, on which the media based their promotion of LREM and Macron—and which provoked distrust, doubts, and hostility in the population—is misleading from top to bottom. The PS was a reactionary party that attacked the working class, and LREM's legislative candidates, carefully selected by conservative politician Jean-Paul Delevoye, are an integral part of the old ruling establishment.

A large number of its parliamentary candidates come from parties that carried out policies of austerity and war in the last decades. Nearly half, 244 compared to 281, already have had political positions at various levels, from municipal office to ministerial posts or seats at the National Assembly. Among 281 who did not directly hold office, many have participated in electoral campaigns or in nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) through which they were in contact with the established parties.

The ties connecting the PS to LREM, whose founder Macron was economy minister under the PS presidency of François Hollande, are legion. Macron was supported from the beginning by top officials or former PS ministers including Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, Lyon mayor Gérard Collomb, former Paris mayor Bertrand Delanoë, Jacques Attali, former prime ministers Manuel Valls and Bernard Cazeneuve, former presidential candidate Ségolène Royal, Hollande administration advisor Bernard Poignant, and Hollande himself.

Macron's parliamentary personnel are largely composed of PS politicians or of parties that were allied to the PS in numerous governments since 1981. A fifth of Macron's legislative candidates are PS members. A dozen come from the Radical Left Party, from ecological parties, or from the Republican and Citizens Movement (MRC) of Jean-Pierre Chevènement. One was the former general secretary of the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF), Robert Hue. In several districts, LREM did not stand candidates against PS candidates whom it supported.

79 candidates on the LREM list were in fact members of the right-wing Democratic Movement (MoDem) of François Bayrou, the current justice minister, though not all ran officially as MoDem members. A large

contingent of approximately 70 candidates comes from the right-wing Union of Democrats and Independents (UDI), a composite organization run by Jean-Louis Borloo, who was a minister in several governments under right-wing President Nicolas Sarkozy.

Ten candidates come directly from Sarkozy's party, The Republicans (LR). A former candidate of the far-right Arise France (DLF), which allied with Marine Le Pen during the presidential campaign, was also on the LREM legislative slate.

LREM legislators are even more socially removed from the mass of working people in France than the PS majority in the old legislature. They are drawn virtually exclusively from the most privileged forces and will run a government whose social base is limited to the layers closest to the financial aristocracy in the affluent middle class and the security forces.

The enormous 57 percent abstention in Sunday's legislative election underscores again their isolation from the vast majority of the population, a fact that even the media outlets closest to LREM are compelled to admit.

The daily *Libération* notes, "According to interior ministry data, more than half of the candidates nominated by LREM are in management or higher-level intellectual professions...three times their weight in France's working population." It adds, "LREM is also the party which has the most forces drawn from management in the private sector (18.4 percent), doctors (21 of 537 candidates), and university professors (17)."

Approximately one third of LREM candidates, or 156 people, run their own business, a fact that provoked the following comment from *Le Monde*: "In general, the so-called 'civil society' represented in LREM is made up of CEOs, doctors, lawyers, private-sector managers or advisers to political officials. The Republic that is on the march there is that of the higher social and professional categories, of dynamic managers, and important people in the provinces."

L'Obs for its part observes the large weight in LREM of "business owners, CEOs, leaders of start-up firms, and small business leaders" and quotes *Me diapart*: "The Republic on the March is a...world of people who are doing pretty well, or rather very well, just like the main electoral base of Emmanuel Macron."

The educational backgrounds of the LREM candidates are equally revealing. According to *Le Monde*, around 40 percent of them come from the so-called *grandes écoles*, major schools where entrance is dependent on special examinations that provide leading personnel in state administration, industry, commerce, and finance. These include Sciences Po (50 candidates), the National Administration School (ENA, 10), and the High Commercial School (HEC, 9).

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