

The Implications of the French Presidential Elections 2012 for the British Labour Party, the UK and Europe

Congratulations to M. François Hollande on his election as the 24th President of France (51.7% to 48.3% (Sarkozy)).

The main purpose here is to try to assess the implications of the result of Sunday's French Presidential elections for the prospects of socialist / left leaning parties in Europe, in particular for the UK Labour Party. To do this a background to the final result should help and that is what I hope going over the handout should achieve.

The handout shows

- a) the make-up of the two Houses of Parliament: the National Assembly and the Senate,
- b) the results of the first round elections held on 28th April of a two-round set of elections (if necessary (any one-rounders?)) and
- c) a very brief résumé of Hollande's electoral programme.

Most of the data necessarily represent the situation prior to the 2nd round which took place only two days ago but I hope even with the benefit of hindsight – knowing the result – you may still like to comment on or ask questions about the final result, e.g. why apparently did the far right Front Nationale supporters not rally behind Sarkozy, or why did the MoD Bayrou centrists throw in their weight behind the socialists to give Hollande his victory? (only last Thursday Bayrou came out in support of Hollande (9% in 1st round) which must have helped to make Hollande firm favourite.) We also have to bear in mind that there is a general election for the National Assembly scheduled for June. As you can see currently Sarkozy's UMP holds an outright majority here. There is also a partial election of the senate due in September.

One of the interesting aspects of elections in France (as it is in many European countries – Holland, Germany, Italy) is the presence of many parties in the electoral system with some power base and consequently the need to form pre-election coalitions into 'fronts' - not nearly the same position as in the UK where as we know the two main parties dominate and a 'coalition' mainly centres on a post-electoral deal with a (formerly) main third party, the Liberal Democrats - although this may change with the relative success of UKIP in the recent local elections. One could argue that the UK position is less satisfactory in that all the parties issue their own manifestos as though this is what the public will get if that party is successful.

Let us now take a look at the various political parties represented in the first round of the presidential elections. Unlike in the UK the formation, dissolution and renaming of parties in France are common occurrences. There are indeed some very appealingly titled parties on the list: Parti Anticapitaliste, Lutte Ouvrières, Debout la République!

Going from the far right, the FN founded in 1972 surprisingly, its stronghold's being in Marseilles and Provence, is already one of the oldest party names. It is now clear that the FN which returned almost 19% of the 1st round vote (despite having no representation in either of the Houses of Parliament!) welcome a split of Sarkozy's UMP (Union of Popular Movement) which they hope will open up the FN's opportunity to become the major force on the right. The UMP was formed in 2002 as a merger of several centre-right parties under President [Jacques Chirac](#). It is made up of diverse "soft" centrists and 'humanistes' and a strong right wing 'The Popular Right' (Le Droite Populaire). The Popular Right (Le Droite Populaire) would not be at all averse to an alliance with the FN. Then there is Bayrou's Centrist MoD (Mouvement Démocratique) – 8.7% down 10% on its 2007 performance - which used to be the UDF - its most marked political characteristic's being in favor of European federalism, up to the point of turning the European Union into a United States of Europe. But even here there's nothing straightforward: the MoD's economic policies range from left-leaning, in favor of social justice, to strongly laissez-faire economics. To the left of the PS, Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Front de Gauche is a coalition created originally for the 2009 European elections composed primarily of the French Communist Party, the Left Party and the Unitarian Left. The Parti Vert (Eva Joly) – 2.5% - who did come out in support of Hollande, **is** a party with a strong central theme – **its** problem is being viewed (perhaps wrongly) as a monothematic entity (as is the case in the UK and elsewhere).

With these facts in mind, let's turn to François Hollande's electoral programme briefly summarised in the handout. Having been confirmed the victor the main issue here today is to ascertain how much it may have affected the margin of his success (51.7% too 48.3%), e.g.

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what might his majority have been had it been less or more left wing? Some of the proposals are distinctly non-Anglo Saxon – very high tax rate for the very rich, and a mandatory social housing programme, for example. Other proposals which have torn at the right's heart are those on homosexuality and the right to vote by non-French passport holders in municipal elections. I have not seen any major priority given to the question of immigration control.

It is very heartening to see a left victory, particularly based on a left programme as a prelude to a left swing in politics in Europe and the UK. In his inaugural speech Hollande proudly used the terms equality, fraternity, liberty and dignity – haven't heard these from Labour lips for a very long time. Earlier in his campaign had stated his main adversary was the financial sector! But there will be problems. France's relationship with both Germany and the UK will be difficult. Both Merkel and Cameron (along with Gadafi!) unequivocally supported Sarkozy, actions which have not gone down at all well in France. Cameron's intervention was in particular unwelcome given his recent histrionics at the EU conference last December. 'Who is Cameron' one German national newspaper editor asked. Of course Merkel may not be in power much longer. So, we hope, with Cameron! On the domestic front Hollande, initially, will face a hostile Assemblée Nationale (see chart). François Fillon, Sarkozy's PM has resigned leaving room for Hollande to approve a successor, probably Martine Aubry to Matignon. But as I said earlier there is a National Assembly election due in June this year and a partial election in the Senate in September. Will the French left's cause be strengthened by Hollande's success and reflected in the parliamentary elections? Hopefully. And again hopefully support for a left wing French government will help the left's cause in the UK.

Interestingly the FN were not supportive of Sarkozy after the first round – Marine Le Pen has seen an opportunity for establishing the FN as the main party of the right so if Hollande fails to deliver she is ready to provide a very alternative medicine for France's ills!

To conclude I would like to put the following questions forward with regard to the new presidency:

- What are the chances of Hollande's success of the adoption of his programme within France? (Mitterand, the last socialist president elected in 1981 stood on a firm socialist-based programme which within two years he had to abandon)
- What is the likely impact on the British Labour Party's future policy? (To some extent this will depend on how successful his policies are within France.) Already one Labour MEP Emma Reynolds interviewed on TV has made it clear the 75% tax on the very rich is out of the question. Judging by the local elections last Thursday perhaps Labour need do nothing radical to be in contention in the next general election.
- what are the probable reactions from other European states, particularly Germany with general elections due next year – will the Merkozy pact give way to a Merlande one ?

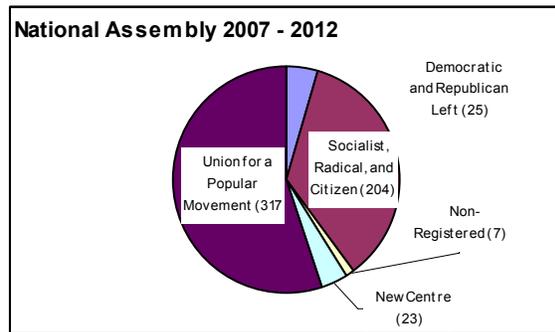
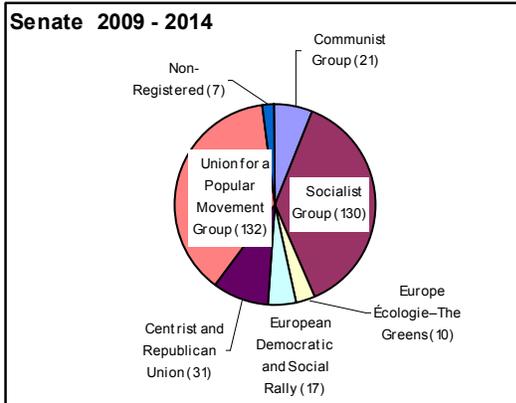
This last question links to a much more fundamental one in relation to the future of social democracy, namely

- Can the social democracy of individual nations (the only form of socialism surviving except in Cuba / Venezuela perhaps) deliver its aspirations when operating in an international oligarchic capitalist environment?

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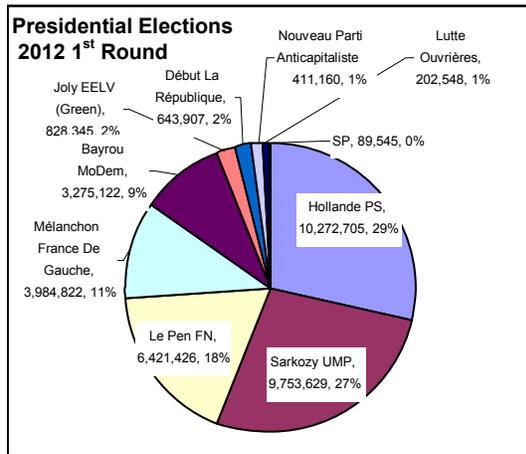
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French Parliament: (April 2012 pre Presidential Election 2nd Round)



**National Assembly: 577 Deputies
Senate : 348 Senators**

First Round Presidential Elections 2012



Parti Socialiste François Hollande's Programme,

- 1) Reabsorb France's national debt by 2017, notably by
 - a) A growth plan of investment: alternative to Euro fiscal package. Amend Treaty if necessary.
 - b) cancelling tax cuts for the wealthy and tax exemptions introduced by Sarkozy.
 - c) raising income tax to 75% for incomes beyond one million euros;
- 2) Retirement age back to 60 for some people.
- 3) Recreate 60 000 jobs cuts in public education.
- 4) Boost family welfare payments by 25%
- 5) Freeze petrol prices
- 6) Renegotiate Europe's fiscal pact and block the treaty
- 7) Homosexual couples to have the right to marry and adopt.
- 8) >=5yrs residents without EU passports the right to vote in local elections
- 9) Housing: rent controls; mandatory building of social housing.