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Party Politics - INTERVIEW

In France, Emmanuel Macron and the Far Right Are Sealing an Alliance

Sunday 3 July 2022, by [STETLER Harrison](#), [TROUVE Aurélie](#) (Date first published: 2 July 2022).

Emmanuel Macron has lost his majority in parliament and looks increasingly set to make deals with conservative and far-right parties. The demonization of the Left and indulgence of Le Pen show the hollowness of his establishment liberalism.

In last month's French parliamentary elections, political gravity finally got the better of Emmanuel Macron, who lost his absolute majority. Although his Ensemble party is still the largest single force, the inability to win a clear mandate in the National Assembly is a considerable defeat, just two months after he was reelected president.

With 242 MPs in the 577-member parliament, Macron's coalition will be forced to negotiate with opposition forces to pass legislation. It has little hope for cooperation from the largest other bloc, the left-wing alliance made up of the Nouvelle Union Populaire écologique et sociale (NUPES). In [elections for official roles in parliament](#) this week, the president's supporters instead made pacts with the third sphere: the old center right and even Marine Le Pen's far-right Rassemblement National, which took 64 and 89 seats, respectively. Two members of Le Pen's party were elected vice presidents of the National Assembly, aided by votes from Macron's allies.

One prominent new MP on the Left is Aurélie Trouvé. After her work on [Jean-Luc Mélenchon's](#) presidential campaign, on June 19 she was elected to parliament for a district in Paris's northern suburbs. She is likewise the president of the so-called [parliament of the NUPES](#), an informal body uniting the left-wing parties with associations, social movements, and cultural figures. An economist by profession, she was formerly president of the alter-globalist organization ATTAC, which she joined in the early 2000s. She is the author, most recently, of *Le bloc arc-en-ciel: Pour une stratégie politique radicale et inclusive* (The rainbow bloc: For a radical and inclusive political strategy).

Trouvé sat down with *Jacobin's* Harrison Stetler to discuss the political situation resulting from June's elections.

HARRISON STETLER

It's been quite a week in France, as the National Assembly is set to reemerge as a real focus of political battle in the months and years to come. What is your reading of the balance of power that's taking shape?

AURÉLIE TROUVÉ

There are three conclusions to be drawn from these elections. First, the Macronists received a major slap in the face. It is the first time in decades that, just after the presidential election, the president's party didn't win an absolute majority in the National Assembly. Macron's forces were neck and neck with us at about 25 percent of the first-round vote. We've seen the consolidation of what Mélenchon calls the three blocs: Macronism, the extreme right, and a left of rupture. In fact, the far right has retreated a bit — they were far behind us in the popular vote and now in the seat count. We have succeeded in positioning ourselves as the first opposition force against the Macronists, which was our objective.

Secondly, the Rassemblement National gained considerable power in the National Assembly, where it now has a record number of MPs, confirming its strength already seen in the presidential election. The levees have broken between the right and the extreme right, where there has been a [de facto convergence](#). This has been a [building for at least the last five years](#). They have a de facto alliance, even if we should not confuse the Right and the extreme right. When I say "the Right" I am talking most of all about the Macronists.

And the third development is us: the return of the Left and ecology on a program of rupture, with over 140 deputies, which is huge. This makes us the first opposition force. What is imperative now is that we keep the NUPES alliance together.

HARRISON STETLER

NUPES really made the strategic choice to politicize the parliamentary elections. But the irony is that the balance of power in the new parliament might accelerate what we've already seen since 2017: namely, Macron's right-wing shift. What is Macron's strategy right now?

AURÉLIE TROUVÉ

Well, it's complicated to say, because I don't think that they even know. They are lost and don't know what to do. As I see things, there is a general analysis to be made, which is that ultraliberalism is reaching its limits, and a large part of the population no longer accepts it. And so the Macronists are stuck. They're saying, *Come and form a coalition government with us* while holding on to the same program. It's completely unrealistic.

"We will win power in the long run — and we do intend on governing — only if we stick firm to our convictions."

HARRISON STETLER

Can the divisions within the Macronists be a possible point of leverage for the Left? Macron seems to have decided to keep his ally Élisabeth Borne on as prime minister for the time being. Her general policy speech is on July 5, and she has been engaging in negotiations with the opposition forces. Is there a way to divide the Macronists?

AURÉLIE TROUVÉ

Our strategy is not to go and divide the opposing camp. It's to remain firm on our convictions: the 650 programmatic measures agreed on by the NUPES alliance. If we are convinced of one thing, it is that we will win power in the long run — and we do intend on governing — only if we stick firm to our convictions. Where can we grow support and make inroads? It is with the abstentionists — all these people are disappointed and disillusioned with politics because they feel that politicians do not keep to their commitments. We are going to keep to our commitments, and we are not going to try to divide the other side by watering down some measures. If some people want to come to us, fine, but it's not our job to go get them.

HARRISON STETLER

You mention abstention. But with 54 percent of registered voters not voting, these elections didn't give an encouraging sign.

AURÉLIE TROUVÉ

Exactly. That's why I say that I think there will eventually be a dissolution [of parliament — i.e., repeat elections]. We don't know when. But in any case, we are ready to go back to the campaign, and eventually govern. And for that, we have to remain clear and coherent on all the programmatic work we have done.

HARRISON STETLER

Dissolution is the question at the back of everyone's mind these days: *When will it come? What positions are all the political forces going to be in by the time it happens?* Between now and then, nobody wants to be in a position of having been at fault for paralysis. We all know that the government sees you as the main threat, and that they will seek to make you out as the cause of that. How does the NUPES navigate this?

AURÉLIE TROUVÉ

Yes, well that's why we say that the Macronists are completely responsible for what's happening today: for the Rassemblement National's extremely high score, and for the coming paralysis. They have blocked the country out of their pursuit of ultra-liberalism, which has led us into the current impasse.

HARRISON STETLER

On July 5, we have Prime Minister Élisabeth Borne's policy speech, which may be followed by a vote of confidence. Where will the NUPES fall on the vote of confidence?

AURÉLIE TROUVÉ

We are asking for a vote of confidence. Obviously, we will not give our confidence. But we ask for this vote because it is the basis of parliamentary democracy. Obviously, it is not mandatory, but it has become common practice to do so. So is Macron going to take the risk of not giving a vote of confidence, and thus provoke the institutional chaos that makes it such that each text will be discussed without the legitimacy of the government in the National Assembly? If he doesn't ask for a vote of confidence, it is entirely an extension of his monarchical view of the presidency. But at some point, he will be plunging us into institutional deadlock.

HARRISON STETLER

Perhaps people are over-sensationalizing the deadlock in parliament. The Rassemblement National and the center-right Les Républicains may formally be in the opposition, but all the signs point to them being willing to work with the Macronists. There's 64 Les Républicains votes, 89 Rassemblement National MPs, and 242 Macronists — they are divided, but they can pass laws and keep parliament functioning.

“Macron and the far right are in the process of sealing an alliance that does not identify as one”

AURÉLIE TROUVÉ

Of course, and this is why we need to remain a clear opposition force, because they are in the process of sealing an alliance that does not identify as one. We will be the only true opposition force, which is why we'll be able to govern one day. Don't forget that Les Républicains and the Macronists really have the same right-wing bourgeois electorate. The real mystery is the Rassemblement National, which has managed to capture part of the popular vote. We have to be able to make inroads there, and among abstentionists. If we want to govern, we will need to be in a position to politicize these elections even more than we already have.

HARRISON STETLER

On left-wing unity, how are things looking on the inside? Macron would like nothing more than to see the NUPES alliance divided. Just about any signs of left-wing disunity are amplified in the media.

AURÉLIE TROUVÉ

Yes, but it's not working. The stories are almost trivial, and even if we have our differences, they are disproportionately amplified. Apart from that, we're learning to work together and in concertation. We are going to have common candidates for all the important positions in the National Assembly. We continue to stand for our 650 propositions. We have an intergroup committee that will meet every week. We have the parliament of the NUPES that I will relaunch, which is also a strategy of openness to the associative and cultural world outside the National Assembly. I can sincerely tell you that the intergroup committee is working well. Yes, they will try to divide us, but I think that it is a lost cause.

HARRISON STETLER

One of the ways that the Macronists are trying to sow division is by claiming that Mélenchon and Le Pen represent an [identical existential threat](#).

AURÉLIE TROUVÉ

It's an outrageous claim. Arguing that the Left and the extreme right are the same is profoundly

anti-republican. They are the ones who are in the process, little by little, of blurring the lines with the extreme right, and finally of breaking the republican front.

HARRISON STETLER

Let's step back a bit. The French situation is quite exceptional: the NUPES is a pluralist left-wing alliance, rooted in what you call a "left of rupture." As a veteran of the French social movements of the last twenty years, how was this possible? We all know the short-term explanation: Mélenchon's strong showing in April's presidential elections allowed him to impose his line on the rest of the Left. But this obscures what is more akin to a generational change.

AURÉLIE TROUVÉ

Many of us come from social movements and are closely linked to associations or unions, and many are discovering the Assembly and parliamentary politics for the first time, like me. I'm in my forties and am really from the alter-globalist generation. I was born in 1979, the year Margaret Thatcher came to power, and I belong to the generation that has only known neoliberalism. Even if I was with ATTAC, which, as an association, was very critical of the [Socialist Party](#), I had a bit of hope when François Hollande came to power in 2012, but was very quickly disappointed. I think that Hollande's term precipitated the centrist liberalism line into the abyss. In any case, it prepared things for Macron, who really is the continuity of Hollande's Socialist Party.

Since the beginning of the 2000s, I've thought that we would only win on a line of rupture. I fought against the European constitutional treaty. This is also Mélenchon's conviction since the 2000s: we cannot fight against injustice by adjusting at the margin a system that is extremely unjust.

Also, I don't think we can really call the Hollande-era Socialist Party the center left. It's the NUPES really that is the continuation of the 1981 Socialist Party. We are not the "extreme" left. It must be said that there has been an attempt to disqualify us on those grounds. Yes, we are a radical left in the sense that we have arrived at a situation where in order to really change things, [we have to attack things at the roots](#).

"I was born the year Margaret Thatcher came to power, and I belong to the generation that has only known neoliberalism"

HARRISON STETLER

Your recent book, *Le bloc arc-en-ciel*, can be read as something of a NUPES manifesto. In it you talk about what you call a "pincer strategy." What is that strategy?

AURÉLIE TROUVÉ

[Erik Olin Wright](#) makes the argument that there are three ways for us to wage the political battle. There is the interstitial strategy: changing things within capitalism through cells of resistance like ZADs [occupied "Zones to be Defended"], and so on. There is also the confrontational strategy like

the [gilets jaunes](#) in the street, etc. Then there is the strategy of participation within the institutions.

The pincer strategy is the idea that we need to make the link between members of the National Assembly, people in institutions, local elected officials, and what is happening in the social movements outside the institutions. It is going to be essential that there is pressure from the streets. This will be one of the goals of the NUPES parliament: a meeting ground between social movements and institutional politics. We will not be able to substitute ourselves for the social movements. Without strong social movements shaking society outside the institutions, and that are autonomous, it will be complicated for us to do our work.

HARRISON STETLER

Indeed, social movements add another factor that could destabilize the already complicated situation in parliament.

AURÉLIE TROUVÉ

A strong social movement without a majority in the assembly could make things very interesting. And a movement like the *gilets jaunes* even more so. Things are likely to be very tense in the public schools from the start of the academic year in September. There is already a huge shortage of teachers, who are facing a massacred public school system and frozen salaries. This concerns the teachers, of course, but also parents' associations. This will hurt.

In fact, it can come from just about anywhere. Take the crisis of purchasing power. The government has been unable to find a serious response, or is even making the situation worse. The purchasing power law that is being drawn up is a total flop. It doesn't actually lower prices for consumers. It normalizes what are already very high gas prices.

What you have to look at are the economic indicators: purchasing power has dropped by 2 percent, not to mention mortgage costs, which are rising. That's why when you talk to people, they say, *I'm underwater, I can't take it anymore*. The government can of course say whatever it wants on TV, but at some point there is the concrete situation that people are facing.

HARRISON STETLER

It's curious that Mélenchon has withdrawn and has not run for reelection. Will his absence be felt on the Left?

AURÉLIE TROUVÉ

I think he will continue to play a central role. It is true that he is now stepping back a bit, which, in my opinion, can also be useful for us. But I realized during the campaign in particular how essential Mélenchon as a figure really is in lower-class parts of France.

HARRISON STETLER

With parliament enjoying new centrality, there's been a lot of talk about the crisis in the late 1950s that prepared the origins of the [Fifth Republic](#). I've had a hard time not seeing Mélenchon as playing something of a Charles de Gaulle-like role by withdrawing.

AURÉLIE TROUVÉ

To be in a better position to come back? Well, he's in great shape. I think we need him — I say that

sincerely. However, I was not a Mélenchonist from the beginning. He is also leaving a space for the movement to build itself, even while still being there.

P.S.

- Jacobin. 07.02.2022:

- <https://jacobin.com/2022/07/macron-melenchon-nupes-republicains-national-assembly-alliance>

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