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Johnson Government falls over sleaze but the cost of living crisis brings economics back into sharp political focus. Tory contenders call for tax cuts and smaller state. All the wrong answers. Richard Murphy offers a different prospective and an economic reset

It's time the government took centre stage in the economy, not least because the financial markets refuse to do so

Richard Murphy

The economic vision that I posted on Saturday has a longer underpinning (and I would argue, better) document that supports it, and from which it was extracted. That longer document is of some 8,000 words and is available here. The summary of this version says:

The economics of neoliberalism has dominated British politics since 1979. Whether governed by the Conservatives or Labour the ideology underpinning government has been the same. The belief in Westminster has been that markets know best, the choice that markets supposedly provide to people is what they want, and that whatever the issue government is best off backing away from any solution it can think of. Instead, it should outsource the problem to 'the market' because, it has been claimed, the consequence will always be better.

The only problem with this belief is that it is clearly not true. As is very apparent, education, health and social care, justice, and much else is worse now than most of us can recall it being in earlier periods. What is more, pensions and benefits are worse and economically it is clear we are falling behind other similar nations to ourselves. Importantly, not all of that can be blamed on Brexit: the malaise is the result of the failed culture of neoliberalism that made the financial crash of 2008 and the Covid crisis so much worse in the UK than elsewhere.

Given that it was apparent after 2008 that neoliberalism was failing it would have been reasonable to expect the political parties of the left in the UK to have developed a new economic philosophy to replace it by now. That, however, has not happened. Instead, Labour accepted the blame for that crash, and has not returned to power as a result since then. And even now, when facing a deranged government that is intent on destruction there is widespread agreement that neither Labour or other parties on the left (including the SNP in Scotland) have any coherent economic alternative to offer from that which the Tories still provide. That is a massive hole in the left's electoral armoury.

This paper suggests a new economic vision. It rejects the neoliberal idea that suggests that economic growth delivered through a faith in market solutions will answer all questions.

Instead it suggests that the left must create a sustainable economy by putting all the resources available within society to best use, including those that the market fails to use to best effect.

In practice, the paper argues that the greatest unused resource in our economy are people's savings. Developing an analysis based on major developments in the understanding of savings, money, the way banks operate and the behaviour of companies that have become understood in the last decade, it is suggested that cash savings stored in bank accounts now add almost no value to the economy and that companies are no longer dependent upon money raised from saving in shares for almost any of the investment that they make. As a result most of the £8.4 trillion of financial assets owned by people in the UK are not being directed towards any useful social purpose in the UK at present.

An analysis of those savings suggests that more than eighty per cent of them are saved in tax incentivised mechanisms, of which pensions and ISAs are by far the most important. Tax subsidies to these types of saving now cost almost £60 billion a year in the UK, which is more than the budget of most UK government departments, such as defence. If, however, the assets in which they save (mainly cash, shares, second-hand properties and some bonds) are not being used for the advantage of society as a whole but are instead being used to subsidise growing inequality, because almost half these reliefs go to the wealthiest ten per cent in the country, then not only is this subsidy wasted but might actually be doing harm. Because that subsidy has encouraged the over-expansion of the City of London, which captures much of this sum for its own advantage, that might be doubly true.

As a result this paper suggests that the way in which tax subsidies in the UK are given should change so that the near £700 billion now saved in ISA accounts will eventually be almost entirely redirected towards the funding of a Green New Deal whilst one quarter of all new pension contributions should be used for the same purpose. Doing so will redirect around £100 billion of savings a year to pay for the transformation of the UK economy to a sustainable basis whilst supporting full employment and the release of funds within existing budgets to deliver the public services the country wants. Because the redirection of funds does not require any new taxation, but does instead redirect existing tax reliefs, it does not add to tax demands, although the tax reliefs available to some of the wealthiest people in the UK will be reduced.

All political parties on the left require a new economic vision, and an explanation as to how they will fund it. This vision does both of those things, whilst at the same time strengthening the inter-generational contract within the country that is essential to the long-term prosperity of all within it. In the absence of any alternative, it is the vision that this country needs now because it gives the government a new role as the intermediary between savers and investment for the overall good of society. Financial capitalism has abandoned that role. The state must take it on. In the process it can and must redirect the capital of society. No major changes in society have ever taken place without such a redirection taking place. The change implicit in this vision is now overdue. It's time for it to be delivered.

Full Manifesto from Richard Murphy

An Alternative Strategy to Address the Cost-of-Living Crisis

We are in the midst of the worst cost of living crisis in a generation. Wages are falling and the economy is stagnating. Yet in many sectors corporate profits are booming and the number of billionaires in the UK is at record levels.

Whilst inflation is at 9.1% and rising, wages are lagging behind and demand is being sucked out of the economy. The real risk to the economy is not a wage-price spiral but a recession that could cost jobs and deepen poverty and inequality in the UK.

This situation requires urgent action from the Government to protect people from the cost-of-living crisis and to control inflation and bring it down.

At a time of economic crisis, it is time to think big and be radical in restructuring our economy so that never again do people endure a decade or more of falling real wages and rising poverty whilst the threat of climate crisis grows ever more pressing.

- John McDonnell MP, former shadow Chancellor
- Naomi Klein
- Ann Pettifor, Prime Economics
- Dr Johnna Montgomerie
- Professor Daniela Gabor, UWE, Bristol
- Ozlem Onaran, Professor of Economics, University of Greenwich
- Richard Wilkinson, Professor Emeritus of Social Epidemiology, University of Nottingham
- Professor Suzanne J Konzelmann, Birkbeck
- Danny Dorling, Professor of Geography, University of Oxford
- Grace Blakeley
- Dr James Meadway, Director, Progressive Economy Forum
- Dr Guy Standing, SOAS
- Will Stronge, Director of Research, Autonomy

This means:

1. Inflation-proofing incomes (wages, pensions and benefits) to provide immediate and short-term protection against rising prices.

2. Controlling prices is vital to reducing inflationary pressures, which is why we need urgent regulation of and caps on rents, energy prices and fuel and preparation of price controls on basic foodstuffs. Cutting VAT, at an historic high of 20%, would also be a sensible policy.

3. Profits have been soaring in some sectors of the economy. The windfall tax that has been introduced in the energy sector now needs to be extended with an excess profits levy across sectors of the economy where profiteering has also been evident.

4. Companies are awarding generous remuneration and bonuses to bosses whilst their workers struggle to make ends meet. This warrants the introduction of Labour's previous policy implementing an 'Excessive Pay Levy' on companies with staff on very high pay or with excessively wide pay ratios.

5. To reduce inequality, we have to tax wealth and redistribute power. Taxing income through investment at the same rate as income from work – through equalising capital gains tax rates with income tax – would be a start. But we must go further by taxing second and multiple homes more heavily

6. It is vitally important that Government respects trade union rights and does not further undermine the mechanisms by which workers are able to bargain collectively for better wages and to maintain living standards.

7. A serious programme of investment is needed to stimulate the economy, create higher-skilled jobs, improve productivity and achieve Government policies like net zero carbon emissions, and levelling-up the country. Building a new generation of affordable zero carbon council housing would also be a wise investment.

Why we should support the Mick Lynch and the RMT workers.

Potters Bar, Hatfield and Grenfell. All victims of "modernisation" and Government recklessness.

The recent three days of strike action by rail workers may have caused inconvenience to some but it is a dispute and a cause that the public should support. Leaving aside the question of pay and whether workers should bear the brunt of yet more austerity or whether the profits of multi national corporations should take a hit there are bigger considerations that should be listened to in the debate, There is lots of talk of "union dinosaurs" and the need for "modernisation". But the should beware of the history of "modernisation" and should also heed its previous results.

This is not the first time that the talk of modernisation of the rail industry has been around, presented by a previous Tory government, and one that had serious consequences.

The initial privatisation of the rail system saw the creation of Railtrack, a private company responsible for maintenance, and a phase of mass redundancies and outsourcing to private companies. The portrayal of the chaos produced in the industry is best represented in the Ken Loach film "The Navigators" and a fictional portrayal of the reduction in safety. Although a fictional representation it was based on tragic facts. Few will remember Michael Mungovan, a promising Irish student, sent for a holiday job by an employment agency to work for a railway contractor. After two days training on a rural line Michael was sent to work unsupervised on the main line at Vauxhall outside of Waterloo station. On his third day he was hit by a train and killed by a train travelling at 50 mph. The inquest found significant failings in the safety regime that led to his death. But bigger accidents involving members of the public as well as workers were also occurring during this period, faulty points maintenance at Potters Bar, broken rail at Hatfield and poor driver training at Ladbroke Grove led to deaths driven by profit over people as the overriding mantra of "modernisation". These disasters led to the bankruptcy of Railtrack and the renationalisation needed to restore public confidence. The new regime proposed by Grant Shapps will restore the previous regime that led to those disasters.

And it is not only the rail industry that has created these "modernisation" catastrophes. Anyone following the Grenfell enquiry investigating the death of 72 people residents in the tower block fire will already see from the initial report that "modernisation" or deregulation was a major contributor to the deaths. The deregulation of fire safety and Building Control away from public bodies led to perverse incentives for building owners and the construction industry to prioritise profit over safety.

Our whole economy and public services are littered with the disasters of "modernisation".

From the targetting of low educational achievers and poor neighbourhoods by Capita to satisfy army recruitment targets and achieve bonuses through to the disaster of prison privatisation and its effects on staff and inmates. All are driven by the change from a public ethos to a profit ethos.

The mantra of "modernisation" is a failure and we should also beware of the people selling it. Safety critical industries rely on strong training, maintenance and trust elements and for workers and the public to be sacrificed is wrong. When I am on a train travelling at over 100 mph I want to know that the driver and maintenance workers are secure and well paid and not some insecure agency worker propping up the gig economy. Failure of workers in their duties can lead to interviews by the Health & Safety Executive under criminal caution and with criminal penalties. Yet evidence shows that many incidents are systemic rather than individual.

The PPE scandal of the pandemic highlighted the corruption of contracts and the revolving door of politics and big business. The origins of the Railtrack fiasco led from transport ministers who went on to sit on the Boards of construction companies and the latest current transport minister Grant Shapps made his reputation on selling an online ponzi scheme under a false identity.

Mick Lynch and Eddy Dempsey, the RMT officials, may be a bit rough around the edges but their honesty and straightforwardness contrasts well to the increasing dodgy facts trotted out from the government. Like many, I owe my life and livelihood to workers in those safety critical roles and we owe them our support and not just the clapping support of the pandemic. We should always remember that what happens to those workers will not be long before it is happening to all of us and the whole of society.

Dave Berry

FBU RESPONSE TO THE GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY

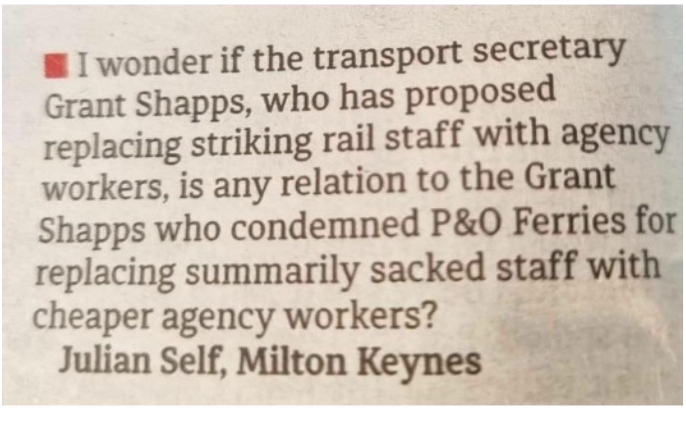
PHASE 1 REPORT

TSSA raises safety concerns with ORR over Network Rail job cuts

RMT Statement on Strikes and Negotiations

Every railway ticket office in England to close under new plans - reports

The Grant Shapps guide to making money



I wonder if the transport secretary Grant Shapps, who has proposed replacing striking rail staff with agency workers, is any relation to the Grant Shapps who condemned P&O Ferries for replacing summarily sacked staff with cheaper agency workers?

Julian Self, Milton Keynes

The cost of living crisis and the true facts of industrial action

Although the three days of rail strikes made all the headlines in the mainstream media very little facts or analysis was offered and the general public were left with the impression of workers wanting more rather than defending themselves from losses and changes to terms and conditions. In the case of Network Rail the employer is following direction from the Transport Minister Grant Shapps to make up to £2 billion of savings. The CWU dispute now under ballot again is about changes to terms and conditions with proposals to make Sunday part of the normal working week. In times of crises when workers are under pressure employers invariably use the circumstances to strengthen their hand. In the past specialised correspondents would have provided more content and commentary on industrial disputes and in the following article Sam Bright mourns their passing.

The Media Needs More Labour Correspondents

Jettison the lobby journalists.

by Sam Bright

28 June 2022 Novamedia

"In the past, there were enough labour correspondents to mount a cricket team to play the union barons before the Trades Union Congress started each year," journalist John Mair wrote for the BBC in 2011. "Today, they could not umpire that match."

Little has changed in the decade since Mair's statement. In fact, labour correspondents – specialist journalists covering industrial disputes, matters relating to pay and working conditions, and the relationship between trade unions and the government – have all but disappeared.

In the last week, their absence has become glaring. Mick Lynch, boss of the RMT, has dominated the airwaves – think Ross Kemp in an industrial dispute – battering through the inane anti-union tropes of TV presenters and Tory MPs with both incredulity and fact-laden rage. For a brief moment, media amnesia around employment issues was shattered as union representatives demanded material improvements to their members' lives in clear, accessible terms. And yet as Alan Jones, industrial correspondent at the Press Association, tells me: "There's hardly anyone who covers trade unions day-to-day. I'm probably the only one, aside from maybe a few of the leftwing papers that periodically cover industrial affairs. Even the Daily Mirror doesn't have someone dedicated to covering unions. The BBC doesn't either."

The heyday.

The 1970s and 1980s – a time of relatively high industrial employment, union strength, and industrial unrest – was the heyday of industrial journalism in the UK. In 1957, the proportion of workers in industrial employment stood at 48%. By 1979, this figure had fallen to 38%, declining to 27% by 1998 and just 15% by 2016. Union membership peaked in 1980 at 12.2 million, halving by 2012.

As many disputes took place in parts of the country with historically high rates of industrial employment, specialist correspondents acted as loudspeakers for regional interests, carrying back the demands of union representatives and their members to power-brokers in Westminster.

"My personal flashback is to the decade of industrial conflict under Margaret Thatcher when BBC newsrooms and national newspapers were so well served by local and regional journalists who themselves were so well versed in industrial and trade union affairs," says Nicholas Jones, a former BBC industrial and political correspondent. "Local reporters were out and about, visiting factories, talking to workers, calling in at union offices, while today, their much-depleted successors are so often tied to their computer screens, having to ring round their contacts or rely on social media for first-hand accounts."

It's worth stating that the existence of industrial correspondents didn't automatically ensure positive media coverage of the labour movement. The media was even more instinctively pro-establishment in the 1980s than it is now. The BBC's reporting on the infamous Battle of Orgreave in 1984, for example, saw the broadcaster accused of reversing the order of events to make it seem like the strikers initiated the confrontations with the police. Indeed, Thatcher ruthlessly exploited this media climate. But industrial correspondents nonetheless ensured industrial debates were had, with unions and their members portrayed as powerful political actors in a way that hasn't been replicated since.

"Many of the industrial journalists writing for Conservative-supporting newspapers took pride in the accuracy of their reporting," says Jones of the 1980s. "They insisted the facts and quotes in their stories were sacrosanct: editors could determine the headlines, presentation, and layout, but if content was altered or manipulated, they not infrequently asked for the removal of their bylines."

Disappearing dispatches.

The demise of the industrial correspondent can partly be attributed to the fact that the unions lost. Thatcher successfully "crushed" their power – her stated aim – and the industries they represented. Neoliberal enterprise and free market economics took over.

After the miners' strike, instead of employment issues being reported from the perspective of workers and their trade unions, "the emphasis was increasingly on financial news and the profit and loss of the manufacturing and service sectors," says Jones.

This decline mirrored Thatcher's economic restructuring. According to Jones, financial market deregulation "only served to underline the demise of the trade unions. The end of nationalisation and the take-up of shares by workers in the newly-privatised industries was a stark reminder of the shift which had taken place."

And so, as the free market ripped through former industrial areas, and as capital fled to the south east, the media obediently followed. "Newsrooms have been decimated in towns and cities across the country, hollowing out local news gathering," Jones explains.

It helped that the British press also became concentrated in the hands of a few oligarchs during this period. These figures, such as Rupert Murdoch, who bought the Times in 1981 and benefited directly from Thatcher's free market ethos, certainly had no love for the labour movement.

A focus on parliamentary politics further hastened the industrial correspondent's decline. New Labour governments institutionalised an anonymous briefing system whereby political secrets were strategically fed to sympathetic lobby journalists – the political reporters allowed access to Westminster – thereby marginalising reporters outside the bubble.

"The top jobs are now political reporters. The lobby is all powerful," says PA's Alan Jones. Nicholas Jones concurs. "Unattributable and anonymous briefings [have] become the lifeblood of modern political journalism," he writes, attributing this shift to the cunning public relations instincts of the Blair and Brown administrations.

The demise of local and specialist reporters has resulted in the lobby leading on all matters relating to politics and policy – starkly illustrated by the drip-feed of news during the Covid-19 pandemic via social media accounts of the connected. Trapped in Westminster, spread too thinly to have any specialist policy expertise, political psycho-dramas are the major currency of these gossip merchants.

The fate of the lobby journalist is controlled by their level of access – aka the number of MPs listed in their phonebook. Their success relies on proximity to decision-makers and on their ability to exploit the patronage of politicians, creating a system where political reporters aren't motivated to expose the worst abuses of the powerful. Any latent radicalism within the lobby is tempered by a fear of losing their contacts and being thrown out of the club.

Reporters returning?

The decline of the industrial correspondent wasn't inevitable. With the unions debilitated, and Britain rapidly shedding its manufacturing capacity, there was a good case for industrial correspondents to remain on the beat. If they had, we'd no doubt have a better understanding of the causes of Brexit, the sense of economic impotence across swathes of the country – induced by an upsurge in job insecurity and in-work poverty – and the Labour party's consequent identity crisis in the 'red wall'.

Instead, amid chronic wage stagnation, mass job insecurity, a foreign labour shortage, the rise of the gig economy and the polarisation of assets between rich and poor, we have a media ecosystem in which Piers Morgan is paid £15m annually to speculate on the hidden evil lurking behind Lynch's Facebook profile picture. This is an industry which contains almost no official industrial correspondents who would have been familiar with Lynch before this wave of RMT strikes started.

As workers are squeezed and inequality continues to soar, there's a clear need for a new breed of industrial correspondent. While the public is currently blinded to the aims and ideological underpinnings of union action by a media establishment subservient to those in high office, better labour journalism would help to rewrite the narratives around collective action.

Is change starting to happen? While leftwing publications have always asserted the importance of covering the labour movement and trade unionism in modern Britain, it remains to be seen if the mainstream press will follow. But as a summer of strikes looms, it might be forced to rethink the precedent set by the last 30 years and invest once more in specialist staffers.

Sam Bright is the author of Fortress London: Why We Need to Save the Country from Its Capital.

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From Mick Lynch of the RMT

Three years ago we accepted a 0% pay rise, two years ago we accepted a 0% pay rise. But this year they came to us with a 0% pay rise plus over 2500 redundancies, changes to terms and conditions. An increase from 28 weeks of nights to 39 weeks of nights. An increase from 32 weekends worked to 39 weekends worked. Currently for a night shift we get time and a quarter, for a weekend turn we get time and a half. They wish to cut both of these to time and a tenth. So that's a 15% pay cut on every night shift and a 40% pay cut on every weekend turn. But they want us to work more of them. This is their modernisation they talk about. Not technology, we embrace technology and have seen more and more of it in recent years. They also wish to fire and re-hire the operative grades and bring them back under a new job title but on £9000 a year less. They also want them to use their own vehicles to get to work sites, this when fuel is at its highest. They will also be pooled when currently they are part of the team. The press are painting this to be about pay above all else. It is not. But now we've said sod them we are going to demand better. I wish everyone could see past the government controlled media smear.

And the Covid Shambles continues

Oxfam: rich countries 'massively betrayed' poor countries on Covid-19 vaccines

By: Calum Rutter

The world's richest governments have been told they failed poorer countries "on every level" on Covid-19 vaccines, with their hoarded stockpiles, unfulfilled promises of donations and efforts to stop them making their own generic versions of the jabs.

Development charity Oxfam said less than half of the 2.1bn vaccine donations promised by G7 countries had been delivered, missing the chance to save nearly 600,000 lives in low and middle-income countries.

It said the UK and Canada have delivered the lowest proportion of the promised doses (39% and 30% respectively), although their deadline is not until the end of 2022.

Oxfam also criticised rich countries, particularly those in the European Union and the UK, for making it difficult for developing countries to produce generic vaccines, aiming to protect the monopolies of the big pharmaceutical companies that first made them.

"On every level, rich nations have massively betrayed poor countries when it comes to Covid-19 vaccines," said Oxfam's head of inequality policy Max Lawson.

"First, they stockpiled all the supply for themselves, then they promised to donate their leftovers, but hundreds of millions of these doses never materialised."

Many doses were delivered in huge numbers at a time and very close to expiry, which countries with struggling health systems found difficult to deal with – meaning lots went to waste.

Lawson added that new variants will make vaccines less and less effective over time, so forcing developing countries to wait means the doses will come "too late".

Julia Kosgei, policy advisor at The People's Vaccine Alliance, called G7 efforts to stall negotiations on waiving intellectual property rights for the vaccines a "disgrace".

"Rich countries have demonstrated that they cannot be trusted to act in the interests of public health for everyone," she said.

"It's time for leaders from the Global South to take matters into their own hands.

"We hope that governments will do whatever is needed to protect their populations, whether that is using flexibilities in global intellectual property rules or circumventing them to save lives."

US: Long COVID Could Be a 'Mass Deterioration Event'

Unions call on ministers to recognise Long Covid as a disability

UNIONS again called for long Covid to be classed as a disability today after shocking official figures revealed that the debilitating condition could be affecting two million people.

Tory ministers must recognise the poorly understood illness as an occupational disease to protect the key workers "who kept our country going" during the pandemic, TUC head Frances O'Grady demanded.

The data, complied by the Office for National Statistics, suggests that 3 per cent of Britain's population was suffering from persistent coronavirus-related symptoms — including chronic tiredness, brain fog and muscle pain — up to four weeks after infection in early June.

Of those self-reporting the condition, 1.4 million said they had contracted Covid-19 at least 12 weeks previously but, alarmingly, 403,000 confirmed that at least two years had passed since their first encounter with the virus.

Nearly three-quarters — 72 per cent — felt long Covid had adversely affected their daily routine, while 21 per cent said the illness had severely limited the number and type of activities they could undertake.

Fatigue was the most common symptom with more than half suffering from it, while shortness of breath, loss of smell and muscle ache were also common.

Ms O'Grady warned that "those workers in health and social care and education are most likely to be affected.

"Many people with long Covid are classed as disabled under the Equality Act so legally their bosses must introduce reasonable adjustments to support them and make sure they don't face discrimination.

"But not everyone has these vital protections. Ministers must urgently recognise long Covid as a disability to make sure that all working people with the condition are formally protected by employment law."

Ms O'Grady, who is due to step down as general secretary of the union confederation at the end of the year, said the move would entitle employees to protection and compensation if they caught coronavirus at work.

She added: "With millions of people now experiencing long Covid, we can't afford to just wait and see what happens — the government must introduce these legal protections now.

"That's the least we owe to the key workers who kept our country going through the pandemic and now have long Covid as a result."

Motions backing the call have already been passed by members of several unions during this year's conference season.

Takeaways from the final round of France's parliamentary elections

Sunday's runoff elections have led to an unprecedented political situation in France: President Emmanuel Macron's coalition has fallen well short of a majority, leaving no single party dominant in the chamber. The left made sharp gains but so did the far right, which surged well beyond expectations and won nearly 90 National Assembly seats. Here are the key takeaways from round two of the législatives.

For Macron's coalition, winning may not come as much consolation. The president's Ensemble (Together) group retains the most seats in parliament, but Sunday's results dealt a severe blow to a party that for the last five years has held a commanding majority of the National Assembly.

Final results provided by the Interior Ministry give Macron's coalition 245 of the chamber's 577 seats. That's 44 seats short of an absolute majority and more than a hundred-seat drop from the 346 seats it held until this weekend's elections.

That leaves the French legislature without a majority party, an unprecedented situation under the Fifth Republic, and raises major questions about whether Macron will be able to deliver on his agenda — especially major, controversial items such as pension reforms.

Two months after being re-elected president, Macron failed to convince voters to give him the "solid majority" he asked for. What could this mean for the next five years in French politics? Here's a rundown of the key takeaways so far.

No majority for the president's party

For the last five years, Macron's party has held roughly 60 percent of National Assembly seats, allowing it to easily pass laws over the objections of its opponents on the left and right.

Now the president's bloc has been whittled down to about 40 percent of seats, meaning it will not be able to pass any laws without winning over new partners. And the leader of the right-wing Républicains – the party most likely to ally with the president's group – has so far promised to remain in the opposition. That leaves France in uncharted territory.

"It's going to take a lot of imagination" to govern, acknowledged finance minister Bruno Le Maire after the vote.

The left heads up the opposition

The pan-leftist NUPES coalition, led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon, was the clear runner-up on Sunday. The group claimed 131 seats according to the Interior Ministry; another 22 seats went to various other left-wing candidates, some of them aligned with NUPES if not running under the coalition label. (This is why most national news outlets put NUPES' tally higher than 131.)

The result falls short of what many predicted, however. FRANCE 24 polling partner Ipsos/Sopra Steria had projected at least 150 seats for NUPES coming out of last week's first round, a threshold that the coalition failed to meet.

Still, leftist leaders cheered the result, with Mélenchon describing it as a "total defeat" for Macron's party.

Far right surges beyond expectations

Perhaps the greatest shock of the night came from the other end of the political spectrum, with Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally winning a record 89 seats. That dwarfs pollsters' predictions and marks more than a tenfold increase from the party's eight current seats.

Le Pen hailed the win as historic, promising to mount a "firm opposition" to the president's agenda while remaining "respectful" of France's institutions.

"The French people have decided to send a very powerful National Rally group to the National Assembly, making it a little more 'national'," she told supporters. Le Pen herself defeated her leftist opponent 61-39 in her northern Pas-de-Calais district.

Jordan Bardella, interim president of the National Rally, called the result a "tsunami" for his party.

Conservatives take a hit but could play kingmakers

The Républicains, longtime standard bearers of the French right, slid from 101 to 61 seats, a sharp setback. They could nevertheless find themselves holding a vast amount of power, with the potential to play kingmaker.

Some prominent members, including the party's former president Jean-François Copé, have called for a pact with Macron's camp.

"It's up to the republican right to save the country," Copé said.

But current party leaders have played down this scenario. Républicains president Christian Jacob promised on Sunday that the party would remain in the opposition, while MP Eric Ciotti – who ran in the party's presidential primary – said he could not see himself shoring up "a failing Macronisme".

Mixed results for Macron's cabinet

It was a rough night for many top figures in Macron's entourage.

Prime Minister Élisabeth Borne, who had never before run for elected office, secured a seat in the northern Calvados region, beating her 22-year-old NUPES opponent with 52.5 percent of the vote. But her cabinet position could still be at risk after Sunday's stinging results for the president's camp.

Several current and former ministers, as well as the National Assembly president, lost their races.

Environment minister Amélie de Montchalin and minister for overseas territories Justine Benin were defeated by leftists, while health minister Brigitte Bourguignon lost to a National Rally candidate. All three are expected to give up their seats in government as a result.

Former interior minister Christophe Castaner – now president of Macron's recently renamed Renaissance party – also lost to a NUPES candidate. So did former sports minister Roxana Maracineanu, who was narrowly beaten by Rachel Keke, a former cleaner who led a successful 22-month strike against the Ibis hotel chain.

National Assembly president Richard Ferrand, too, lost to his NUPES rival.

Most of the cabinet members up for election won their races, however, many of them comfortably. That includes hardline interior minister Gérald Darmanin and Damien Abad, minister for Solidarity and the Disabled, who sailed to victory with 58 percent, despite facing rape accusations.

Calls for compromise

Dealmaking in the coming weeks could make or break Macron's mandate.

"I appeal to everyone's sense of responsibility. We must avoid a deadlock," said finance minister Le Maire after the vote, stressing the need for "listening" and "dialogue" among "men and women who share the president's project".

Turnout dips, but not as low as in 2017

As in the first round, more than half of eligible voters stayed away from the polls. With turnout at 46 percent, electoral participation took a dip since last weekend, frustrating the left's hopes of rallying France's disenchanted.

Poor as the turnout may have been, it did not fall as low as in 2017, when French voters set a record 57 percent abstention rate.

France to fully nationalise electricity

After being forced to privatise 20% of EDF by EU Directive the French government announces plans to take 100% stake in EDF.

Meanwhile, European Parliament votes to endorse gas and nuclear as energy crisis deepens

FRANCE will fully nationalise electricity giant EDF, its prime minister said today, as the European Parliament voted controversially to include natural gas and nuclear in its list of "sustainable" energy sources.

Both moves are responses to Europe's deepening energy crisis as Russia's war against Ukraine and retaliatory sanctions drive prices sky-high — and make the continued flow of gas uncertain.

Elisabeth Borne, who succeeded Jean Castex in France's number two job in May, told lawmakers the crisis meant "we must have full control over our electricity production and performance. We must ensure our sovereignty in the face of the consequences of the war and the colossal challenges to come. That's why I confirm the state's intention to own 100 per cent of EDF's capital."

France already owns an 84 per cent stake in the firm, which it used to limit energy price rises for French households to 4 per cent this year compared to 54 per cent so far in Britain.

President Emmanuel Macron's Together alliance failed to secure a parliamentary majority, and making a nationalisation popular with the left-wing New Ecological and Social People's Union (Nupes) — a left alliance including Jean-Melenchon's France Unbowed, the Communist Party, Socialist Party and Greens — its first signature policy could be a bid for their support. Nupes says it plans to table a vote of no confidence in the government this week.

The announcement came the same day the European Parliament voted to endorse natural gas and nuclear as green energy despite days of protests outside the assembly.

Environmentalist groups say gas — a fossil fuel — and nuclear, a renewable but one which produces toxic waste that remains radioactive for thousands of years — have no part in a climate-friendly energy mix, and the parliament's environment and economy committees had urged MEPs to reject the European Commission's proposals.

But they voted 328-278 against the committees' resolution, meaning penalties for investing in polluting energy sources will not apply to gas and nuclear.

Greenpeace immediately said it would submit a formal request for internal review to the European Commission, and then take legal action at the European Court of Justice if the result isn't conclusive.

industriAll Europe | NEWS | Unions demand a stop to the dismantling of EDF in France

In 2021 EDF workers took six days of industrial action against EU Directive forcing the break up of EDF as a nationalised industry.

Unions demand a stop to the dismantling of EDF in France!

Thursday 08 April 2021

French unions organise their sixth day of action to protest against EDF's disastrous reform plans

Today, French trade unions (CGT FNME, CFDT FCE, CFE-CGC Energies and FO Energie et Mines) have joined forces once more. Together, they stage their sixth day of action to protest about the dismantling of the French multinational electric utility company, EDF, in France.

Workers of the EDF group were called to action on 8 April to mobilise against the disastrous reform plans that are currently under discussion at national and European level. The plan foresees the splitting of the EDF group into different entities. Trade unions consider this a serious threat for EDF workers and for the strategic autonomy of the energy sector in France and in Europe.

To achieve a socially and ecologically just transition and a fair and inclusive recovery, in Europe and in France, it is certain that Europe's energy sector must be strengthened.

IndustriAll European trade union stands with its French affiliates, as well as all EDF workers, to demand a stop to the dismantling of the group. On behalf of the 7 million working men and women in the manufacturing, mining and energy sectors across Europe, industriAll Europe is calling for:

- The suspension of any project that could jeopardise the essential industrial capacities of the EDF group, and more widely, puts Europe's needs at risk
- Full involvement of trade unions in discussions on the future of the EDF group
- A sustainable future for the group that meets the demands of EDF workers

In a joint video message with EPSU, the European trade union federation representing public sector workers, industriAll Europe's General Secretary, Luc Triangle, states:

"We want EDF workers to be respected. We want their future and that of their company to be assured! We want a strong and integrated structure, able to meet the energy and climate challenges of this century, while guaranteeing the best possible working conditions."

Labour on the streets (with banners held high)

Thousands march in Westminster to demand help with Cost-of-Living crisis- The TUC says its research suggests that workers have lost almost £20,000 since 2008 because pay has not kept pace with inflation.

Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign's annual march and rally took place on the anniversary to the day of the infamous action at the South Yorkshire fuel depot where the carefully planned police assault on mineworkers took place.

Fantastic solidarity rally today in Sheffield in support of the RMT with speakers including RMT strikers Olivia Blake MP and Arthur Scargill

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Big Uplifting and inspiring.

The historic Durham Miners' Gala returned on Saturday - and thousands turned out in Durham city centre to join in the celebrations. Crowds of over 200,000 enjoyed the sunshine, speeches and over 50 bands.

Saturday's event marked its 136th anniversary as it was held for the first time since 2019 due to the pandemic.