



France's far-left rallies behind Royal

By James Mackenzie

Paris - France's defeated far-left candidates, among the big losers of Sunday's presidential election, rallied to Segolene Royal, urging supporters to vote against right-winger Nicolas Sarkozy.

Former Interior Minister Sarkozy and Royal will contest a run-off to decide the next president of France on May 6 after they topped the first round of the election on Sunday.

"I think this second round is looking like a referendum against Sarkozy," said Olivier Besancenot of the Trotskyist Revolutionary Communist League.

'I am launching a new appeal to beat the right'

"I am launching a new appeal to beat the right in the streets as well as in the ballot box," he said.

Five years ago, Socialist Prime Minister Lionel Jospin was knocked out in the first round of the election by Jean-Marie Le Pen of the far-right National Front, prompting bitter recriminations from Socialists who blamed the far-left for draining off support.

After the two main Trotskyist parties took almost 10 percent combined in 2002, the far left and environmental score was sharply down this time, with only Besancenot getting more than 4 percent.

But their support could prove significant as Royal seeks to build up momentum against Sarkozy, whose crackdown on rioting in deprived suburbs in 2005 and whose hard line on illegal immigration has sharply divided France.

Arlette Laguiller, the veteran head of the Workers Struggle party, who has run in every election since 1974, said she would be voting for Royal and called on her supporters to do the same.

"I do it without reserve, but without illusions in solidarity with all those in the popular classes who really do not want to see Sarkozy in power and who want anything but Sarkozy," she said.

Green candidate Dominique Voynet and Communist Marie-George Buffet also backed Royal.

Political analyst Christophe Barbier said Royal would need the support of the far left if she is to beat Sarkozy. "If those people decide to take a long weekend... to go enjoy the sunny weather, Segolene Royal will be beaten," he said on LCI television.

REUTERS 

Published on the Web by IOL on 2007-04-22 23:00:45

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