

The French election

We all mourn the death of a policeman in Paris. I send my condolences to his family.

The untimely death shortened the political campaigning, but could not derail the election.

Last week-end French electors faced plenty of choice. The opinion polls held close to election day correctly predicted that voting intentions were very split, and many were still undecided. One of the most fascinating features of the polls was the collapse of support for the socialist party, the Labour party equivalent, and the difficulty for the Republican candidate, the Conservative equivalent, to catch up three others.

Whoever becomes President of France will not belong to either of the two traditional main parties. He or she did not gain more than one quarter of the votes on the first ballot. This means that the uncertainties created by such a wide open election will continue after we know who the President is. The Presidential election will be followed by an election to the Parliament. If the Parliament votes are more strongly for the more traditional parties the new President will have limited powers and have to get on with a Prime Minister who does not agree on some big matters.

Mr Macron is the front runner to win in round two. A former socialist party Minister, he is now a reborn self styled centrist with a movement, not a political party. He might face a Parliament to his right. There could be clashes on economic reform and security. Were Mrs Le Pen to prove the pollsters wrong and emerge as the overall winner, she would probably face a Parliament to her left, with an inbuilt majority to keep France in the Euro and the EU when she wishes to leave.

It is a fascinating commentary on modern France that two of the top four candidates were outsiders, and one was an insider dressed up as an outsider. The only pure political establishment candidate was damaged by his past use of public money to run his office. It implies that many French voters are unhappy with the terrorist attacks, the high unemployment, the lack of growth in living standards and the lack of control over their borders. Some voted for a more left wing alternative who wants to take back control and go for more socialism in one country. Some voted for the National front to leave the Euro and assert national borders. Some voted for the independent who promises to do politics differently without being too precise how.

If the French people fail to give a decisive mandate to a new President, and then fail to give their President a decent level of support in Parliament, the anger and anguish will continue.