

Jean-Luc Mélenchon selected as the French Communist Party's presidential candidate

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On June 16-18, members of the French Communist Party (PCF) selected their candidate for the 2012 French presidential elections. Jean-Luc Mélenchon, co-president of the Left Party (PG), became the first non-PCF member since François Mitterrand in 1974 to represent the PCF in a presidential race. The PCF and the PG work together inside the Left Front—a coalition that attempts to defend the French imperialism in the face of enormous class conflicts, in an epoch where the traditional political parties are completely discredited.

PCF National Secretary Pierre Laurent unveiled the final result of the vote involving 130,000 supposed party members, 70,000 of whom are paid up members. Finally, 59.12 percent of the 47,789 who actually voted, chose the option of a package deal between Mélenchon and the PCF on a shared program for the legislative elections and Mélenchon standing in the presidential elections. Pierre Laurent hailed the result as “a clear, massive and decisive choice.”

Mélenchon's candidature for the 2012 presidential elections is different from that of Mitterrand in 1974—notably because of the collapse of the PCF since then. It was previously occupied a hegemonic position inside the organized working class, but after its participation in the 1980s Mitterrand government and the fall of the USSR in 1991 it has lost credibility. Unlike Mitterrand, Mélenchon is a second rate political figure in French bourgeois politics. However, in the final analysis, the aim of the exercise remains the same: to fight against the development of a revolutionary consciousness in the working class.

In the 1970s, the association of the PCF with communism and the October revolution in the minds of many workers became intolerable to the party, after its betrayal of the 1968 general strike, but it feared losing its influence in the working class in struggle. It feared that layers of workers would come to the conclusion that the

PCF should take power in a revolutionary period. The PCF, which never had any such intention, was concerned not to allow workers to outflank it on the left.

Aiming to eliminate communism from the consciousness of the masses, the PCF made a turn towards Mitterrand and his Socialist Party (PS), based on a bourgeois programme, to give the illusion that its reformist perspectives could defend workers' interests. Politically disarmed, the working class was handed over to a bourgeoisie determined to decimate the industries which had been the most active during strikes. After its “turn to austerity” in 1983, the Mitterrand government was able to impose harsh austerity measures, while closing many car factories and steel plants.

Today, the PCF and PS are deeply discredited in the eyes of workers. The previous PS-PCF-Green “Plural Left” government paved the way for the right wing forces to return to power in 2002 and have been out of government since then. The radicalization of workers due to the economic crisis and the vacuum left by the decline of these traditional parties raises the bourgeoisie's fears of powerful class conflicts.

The communist label still embarrasses the PCF, wanting the questions of socialism to be removed from people's minds. Mélenchon—a former government minister for vocational training when he was a member of the PS—plays this role perfectly for the cynical bureaucrats of the PCF. While he can in his speeches imitate the demagogic style of the PCF leadership, he arouses no political expectations outside of the usual ruts of bourgeois “left” politics.

This is also the function of the Left Front, which bears an ambiguous “left” label but defends a nationalist and militarist perspective. The Left Front is composed of different political tendencies including the Stalinist PCF, Mélenchon's PG, and the Pabloite Left Unity group of Christian Piquet (ex-LCR, Revolutionary Communist

League).

The Left Front has models itself on similar formations in other European countries: in Germany Die Linke, and Izquierda Unida in Spain. These formations support the unions and prevent the working class from a political struggle against the bourgeoisie in opposition to plant closures and austerity measures.

The “left” label of the Left Front can be unreservedly dismissed after examining two important political figures of this formation, and their support for the ever more right wing policies of the Sarkozy government. André Gerin, a PCF parliamentary deputy, participated in the commission to ban the burqa, demonstrating his contempt for the democratic rights of the working class.

In its June 21 article entitled “The deputy André Gerin creates a polemic in the PCF by criticizing immigration”, *Le Monde* quotes him as follows: “‘Today even limiting legal immigration has become vital when faced with an untenable and explosive situation in hundreds of cities in working class communities. The only way to block the [neo-fascistic] National Front (FN) is to show that the situation is in no way ineluctable, and above all there is no reason for fatalism regarding the demographic decline of France and in Europe’, the deputy said. This proposition recalls that of the Minister of the Interior, Claude Guéant, who was castigated by the left”.

With this comment, Gerin shows that the PCF plans to “counter” the rise of the FN by adopting its policies. In order to “block” the FN, Gerin also counts on immigrant-bashing and tries to outflank the FN from the right. This is President Sarkozy’s policy too. Furthermore, André Gerin was never sanctioned by the PCF in 2009 for his participation in the anti-burqa commission.

As regards Mélenchon, he is explicitly hostile to the perspective of an independent policy of the working class for the taking of political power and socialism, preferring to invoke a “revolution by the ballot box.”

He supported the French war of aggression against Libya. An article in *Wordpress* of March 28 summed up the pro-war declarations of Mélenchon: “On March 10, 2011, he voted in the European Parliament for a resolution inviting the member states ‘to be ready’ for a military intervention against Libya. On March 20, supporting the air strikes, he wondered in the *Nouvel Observateur* if we should thank Nicolas Sarkozy. ‘The policy being carried out conforms to France’s interests,’ he stated in *Libération*.”

His anti-burqa positions were just as right-wing. In a January 14 article entitled “Mélenchon wants fines”, *Le*

Figaro quotes Mélenchon’s declarations: “‘We must ban the wearing of the full-body veil, that is my personal conviction, on condition that the law is respectful of republican principles, naturally,’ the Euro-deputy announced on France 24”.

The pretext of the defense of republican principles to fine women who wear the burqa is the same as that used by the government to attack democratic rights of the working class. Mélenchon shows scorn for workers’ democratic rights by aligning himself with the racist campaign of the government—a campaign which has ended up legitimizing the FN as a political party participating in official public life in France.

Mélenchon also called for a reinforcement of European borders, a position with highly nationalist connotations: “Likewise against the European free market, open to all the absurd free-market winds which dominate the world, we must demand that for the EU frontiers in this exceptional period a customs filtering system operates which blocks social and environmental dumping”.

Mélenchon’s words show that his candidature and his Left Front with the PCF do not aim to defend the interests of the working class, but the strategic interests of the French bourgeoisie at home and abroad. This is notably the logic of his declarations aiming to promote a European trade bloc designed to limit competition coming from developing countries like China.

The Left Front’s programme has basically the same goal as the PS programme for 2012 (see also The Socialist Party adopts an anti-working class program in France) On the eve of great class struggles, it attempts, by adopting right-wing policies, to prevent the working class from moving to the left.



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