

French Left Front promotes war in Mali

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France's Left Front is supporting President François Hollande's decision to launch a war in Mali. The Left Front—a coalition of the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF), the Left Party (PG) of former PS minister Jean-Luc Mélenchon, and ex-members of the Pabloite New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA)—endorsed Hollande and his Socialist Party (PS) in the 2012 elections.

The Left Front and its political allies specialize in making cynical, limited criticisms of French government policy, which remain entirely within the boundaries of capitalist politics and the debate over strategy carried out within the imperialist diplomatic and military staffs. While posturing as critics of Hollande, they are however the most fervent defenders of French imperialism.

Mélenchon, whose presidential campaign was praised by the entire European petty-bourgeois “left,” made tactical criticisms of Hollande's decision to go to war to support the reactionary Malian junta of Captain Amadou Sanogo against ethnic-Tuareg and Islamist rebels. He said, “Deciding on that, without first asking the Cabinet or the Parliament, is condemnable.” Speaking on France Info, he called for greater African participation in the French war: “May I ask the question: is there no regional army that has the level to act? Is there not a country named Algeria? The role of the Africans is to act, Africans are adults.” These criticisms are both empty and cynical. The Parliament, which is dominated by Hollande's PS, would have supported the war had it been consulted. In fact, as Left Front deputies soon made clear, the Left Front itself fully supported it.

In calling for other African countries—and the ruthless Algerian regime in particular—to provide cannon fodder for France's war, Mélenchon is engaging in an ongoing debate over imperialist strategy. Significantly, despite the anti-American character of its rallies and propaganda materials, the Left Front is echoing the

positions of Washington, and particularly of the US State Department.

In the pages of the *New York Times*, former US Ambassador to Mali Vicki Huddleston laid out more frankly than Mélenchon the reasons why Paris and Washington want Algeria's help in the war. Huddleston wrote: “Algeria is the only country on the continent with the military capacity, seasoned officers, counterterrorism experience and geographic proximity to take over from France in bringing peace to Mali. Algeria's military leaders know the extremists' tactics and their leaders. It defeated them in a civil war that lasted from 1991 to 2002 and resulted in extremists' setting up terrorist operations in northern Mali. Algeria has a moral responsibility to act, but if it continues to stay on the sidelines, then Morocco or another North African country should take the lead—with support from Niger, Mauritania, Mali and Chad, which, like Algeria, have been fighting Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb for the past eight years.”

The Left Front deputies enthusiastically supported Hollande's war in the January 16 debate in the French National Assembly on the Mali war. Their role was to echo all reactionary lies with which the Hollande administration justifies the French military intervention in Mali.

PCF deputy André Chassaigne—who briefly challenged Mélenchon's bid to be the Left Front's presidential candidate—said: “An international intervention was urgent and necessary to stop the offensive of the Islamist fanatics.”

These pro-war arguments were developed at greater length by PCF deputy François Asensi. He said, “The position of the Left Front's deputies, both Communist and Republican, is clear: abandoning the Malian people to the barbarism of the fanatics would have been a political error and a moral sin. Non-intervention would have been the worst act of cowardice.”

This passage reflects the outlook of an entire layer of the European bourgeois “left,” drawn from Stalinist or petty-bourgeois backgrounds. They instinctively view France’s filthy imperialist wars as a moral duty and an act of political courage. Their denunciations of Islamism stink of politically-motivated hypocrisy, just as their embrace of military intervention glosses over the catastrophic record of France’s imperialist wars in Africa.

The jihadists and Al Qaeda-linked elements now active in the Sahel were major allies of France, the US, and all of NATO in the 2011 war against Libya to topple Colonel Muammar Gaddafi. Now similar reactionary forces are being supported by France and the US in Syria to oust President Bashar al-Assad. The Left Front nonetheless supported the war in Libya, as it backs the imperialist proxy war in Syria, under the guise of defending “human rights”. The crisis in Mali emerges directly from the Libyan war. After the fall of Gaddafi, heavily armed Tuaregs who had fought alongside Gaddafi’s troops returned to Northern Mali and helped Northern Malian Tuareg rebel groups, such as the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), to defeat the Malian army. The fall of Northern Mali prompted a political crisis in the capital of Bamako, as a military coup overthrew President Amadou Toumani Touré in March 2012. Initially, Paris tried to oust the military government of Captain Amadou Sanogo, who was forced to hand over power to an interim government. However, Paris ultimately decided to back the Sanogo junta, which threw out the interim government and now again plays the dominant role in the Malian capital, Bamako, despite its massive unpopularity.

A major focus of Asensi’s intervention in the National Assembly was to demand more international participation in France’s war. He said, “The international community, including our allies, fall over themselves to salute our engagement, without proposing any solidarity in action ... This passivity is appalling.”

He also called for the European Union (EU) to play a greater military role in Mali: “Where is the European Union? ... Its inertia illustrates the current impasse of its construction.”

Such comments illustrate both Asensi’s militaristic politics and his deep hostility to the European working

class. From the outset, the EU has been a tool of financial aristocracy, carrying out massive attack to destroy workers’ living standards across Europe. As broader masses of workers come to despise the EU due to its destructive social policies in Greece and elsewhere, Asensi argued for continuing its “construction,” building it up by having it help France wage imperialist wars. With the war just over 10 days old, France plans to increase its current deployment of 1800 to 4000 troops. Mélenchon and his collaborators are maintaining a deafening silence on how the war will impact North Africa, and the implications for the French population of being dragged into an expanding military intervention in Mali, Algeria, and the broader Sahel. France has vital corporate and geo-strategic interests throughout the region, most of whose countries are former French colonies, and it aims to re-subjugate the region militarily to defend these interests against the growing influence of rival powers, such as China. As France engages in neo-colonial wars throughout Africa and the Middle East, the Left Front functions as tools of imperialism.



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