

Left Front's offer to serve in France's pro-austerity government unnerves NPA

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Left Front leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon's offer to serve as prime minister of France's unpopular, pro-austerity President François Hollande has worried the petty-bourgeois "left" New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA). They fear that Mélenchon's willingness to work under Hollande will expose the bankrupt, anti-working class politics of the entire pseudo-left, the NPA included.

Both the NPA and the Left Front have reacted to the Hollande's failed austerity policies and charges of tax evasion against disgraced ex-Budget Minister Jérôme Cahuzac by echoing Hollande's empty call for a "moralization" of French politics. While NPA spokesman Olivier Besancenot called for an "exemplary Republic," Mélenchon campaigned for a Sixth Republic, i.e., for institutional reforms to the current Fifth Republic.

On Europe1 radio on April 22, he added: "Hollande had the chance to do something good, he missed it. He can make it up ... He can name me prime minister, I'm not scared."

Mélenchon's offer to become prime minister shows that he is a right-wing careerist, eager to carry out austerity policies under the control of Hollande and his Socialist Party (PS), while promoting illusions that they will shift to more pro-worker policies. Such illusions are simply not credible in the working class, however. Hollande's approval ratings are falling to record lows of 24 percent, as his austerity policies undermine the economy.

On May 2, the NPA published a piece by François Sabado, titled "Left Front: Mélenchon Prime Minister?" Sabado begins by voicing his own concerns that Mélenchon had blown his political cover, bluntly asking: "Has Mélenchon totally lost it?"

Sabado continues, "How can one reconcile his quasi-

systematic denunciation of the Hollande-Ayrault government's austerity policies with his proposal to become the prime minister of the very same Hollande? ... How can one explain that one wants a Sixth Republic while proposing to become prime minister in a Fifth Republic dominated by the all-powerful presidency? Such two-sided discourse can only relativize the power of calls for a Sixth Republic."

If there are "two sides" to Mélenchon's persona—one governmental, another wrapping itself in the colours of social opposition—it is that the latter serves as a cynical, clumsy cover for the anti-working class politics of the former. The NPA is afraid that workers will "reconcile" these two faces easily enough, by correctly concluding that Mélenchon is a political charlatan.

Having served 30 years in the PS, including as a Senator and a minister, Mélenchon is a trained and hardened defender of the ruling class. Like the NPA, he called for a vote for Hollande in the 2012 elections, while acknowledging that Hollande would carry out austerity. His offer to be prime minister reflects the class interests he and the PS serve: those of the financial elite and of reactionary sections of the affluent middle class who are enforcing social cuts on the workers.

Sabado's concern, however, is that if workers see through Mélenchon's two-faced politics, they will move into opposition from the left to the NPA, as well.

Sabado writes, "Mélenchon's posture as a potential prime minister is hazardous. It makes one smile, but it does clearly show its own contradictions." Sabado does not spell out what Mélenchon's "contradictions" are, or why exposing them should be "hazardous."

In the short term, Sabado is apparently concerned at the risk of "relativizing" (i.e., discrediting) Mélenchon's bourgeois slogan for a Sixth

Republic—which Besancenot has echoed, and which was the basis for Mélenchon’s one-day protest on May 5, which the NPA supported.

In an April 9 letter, they praised Mélenchon’s May 5 protest for going “in the right direction” and “opening a perspective combining democratic urgency and social urgency.”

That is, while the Left Front was offering its services to prop up Hollande, the NPA was cynically trying to channel popular opposition to Hollande behind the Left Front.

This is part of a broader alliance throughout Europe between the social-democratic and Stalinist forces represented by France’s Left Front and the Pabloite pseudo-left forces of the NPA.

In other countries, such organizations have often formed common alliances, such as Italy’s *Rifondazione Comunista* or Portugal’s Left Bloc, and gone together into government. Both of these parties have voted for policies of social austerity or war—most infamously, *Rifondazione*’s vote to cut pensions and fund the Afghan war in 2007, and the Left Bloc’s support for the Greek bank bailout that devastated the Greek working class.

The NPA is just as implicated as Mélenchon in promoting Hollande’s anti-worker government. At the time of Hollande’s election last year, NPA presidential candidate Philippe Poutou called for a Hollande vote against the conservative incumbent, “On May 6, the election must serve a purpose: to throw out Nicolas Sarkozy.”

The NPA still defends its decision to call for a vote for Hollande. In a May 3 *Journal du Dimanche* interview, Besancenot said: “We put a vote in the ballot box to give a big spanking to Nicolas Sarkozy, I don’t regret it.”

Besancenot supported the Hollande government while acknowledging that Hollande has carried out massive austerity policies together with the union bureaucracy. He said, “Each time the PS is in power, some of the trade union organizations play the government’s game.”

Nonetheless, the NPA has remained as always a reliable supporter of the unions and of a *de facto* alliance with the PS. The NPA thus helps impose a political straitjacket on the working class, allowing governments to push through austerity. Under

Hollande, these include a labour market reform to eliminate job protections, plant closures including at PSA-Aulnay and Goodyear-Amiens, tens of billions in deficit cuts, and the systematic isolation of workers struggles against social attacks.

As deep anger at Hollande’s free-market policies builds up in the working class, the NPA and Mélenchon are terrified of the outbreak of mass working class opposition directed against the free-market policies of the entire political establishment. This is why Sabado does not want Mélenchon’s pseudo-left posturing to be exposed as the fraud that it is.



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