

France: The fraud of Mélenchon's "Fiscal Revolution"

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On November 12, Jean-Luc Mélenchon called for a "Fiscal Revolution" amid rising mass anger with France's Socialist Party (PS) government. Mélenchon—the leader of the Left Party (PG), a PS split-off—has been supported by the PG's partner in the Left Front coalition, the French Communist Party (PCF). Together with PCF national secretary Pierre Laurent, Mélenchon has called for a week of action culminating in a December 1 demonstration.

Shocked and stunned by PS President François Hollande's unprecedented collapse in the polls, the Left Front is desperately seeking to provide a safety valve for popular opposition to the Hollande administration, which the Left Front helped elect. In a recent CSA opinion poll, 67 percent of the population said they were prepared to take to the streets to protest the Hollande administration's policies.

Speaking in the same terms as recent confidential reports dated September 27 and October 25 gathered from the local *préfets* (police chiefs) warning of mass opposition movements "outside the trade union framework," Laurent stated that "government policies...are rejected, anger and cries of alarm are rising everywhere...the government is heading for a crash."

The Left Front's initiative is a political fraud perpetrated by a coalition of parties that are longstanding PS allies and called for an unconditional vote for Hollande in the presidential elections. Mélenchon has declared that its deputies would never vote for a motion of censure against the PS government and has even offered to become Hollande's prime minister.

A "Call from trade unionists for the December 1 march" published in *L'Humanité* on November 20 says the Hollande administration is carrying out "a

policy far removed from the reasons for which it was elected." It urges "those who are furious at seeing its policies continuing to be applied, to mobilise as broadly as possible in the broadest unity in order to impose other choices."

This is entirely disingenuous. Hollande campaigned on a pro-business platform, at one point stressing that there are "no longer any communists in France" and that the banks would be safe with him in power. His policies have been in line with reactionary attacks waged on the working class by social-democratic governments throughout Europe, including the PASOK government of Prime Minister George Papandreou in Greece or Spanish Prime Minister José Zapatero.

The Left Front's call for the December 1 march proposes "a fiscal revolution, the taxing of capital and the abandonment of the rise in TVA [purchase tax]." Asked on TV what would be his first actions if in power, Mélenchon replied it would be to "overturn the logic of pensions, go back to 60 years [age of retirement], fiscal reform, the Sixth Republic... Then everyone gets to work."

With such phony rhetoric, Mélenchon and his allies are riding to the rescue of Hollande and Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault, as they face anti-government protests in Brittany against closures and sackings and an eco-tax on lorries which will penalise rural businesses.

Together with popular opposition to a rise in purchase tax and a wave of factory closures and sackings, this brought their approval rating to a record low of 15 percent. The TVA increases will pay for tax breaks of €30 billion for corporations "to boost competitiveness," including €10 billion in 2014 which households will pay for to the tune of €11 billion of extra taxes.

The Left Front's implicit claim that the pseudo-left

parties can fight to convince the PS to abandon austerity is a political lie. The PS has been a party to every austerity measure imposed by the European Union on Greece, which has destroyed social services and much of Greece's economy, brought youth unemployment to over 60 percent, and driven the rise of the fascist Golden Dawn party.

Mélenchon and the leading personnel of the Left Front, no less than the PS, are instruments of finance capital. The banks will retain the whip hand and prevent any concessions, even the meagre ones demagogically proposed by Mélenchon. The downgrade of France's credit rating by Fitch in July, joining Standard and Poor's and Moody's, was a warning of a possible punitive move by the banks to hike France's debt servicing costs if it does not slash public spending and workers' rights.

The *Financial Times* of London wrote, "Mr Hollande is angering those who believe much more must be done to cut public spending, which, at 57 per cent of gross domestic product, is the highest in the euro zone. Mr Hollande acknowledges France must cut the state sector and boost competitiveness ... In Brussels, the European Commission in May issued detailed economic recommendations to Mr Hollande – which, under new EU crisis-fighting regulations, carry the threat of heavy sanctions – that urged him to take bolder reform measures."

The government, though it has temporarily suspended the eco-tax in Brittany, is adamant that it will maintain it throughout France. The Left Front has played a reactionary role to block opposition to the eco-tax and support the PS government against the protests.

On Thursday, cereal and livestock farmers blocked roads leading to Paris to protest taxes and the unequal distribution of farm subsidies by the European Union. On November 2, in the Breton town of Quimper, there had been a demonstration of some 20,000 protesters, largely made up of workers and small farmers and small business owners fighting for their jobs and livelihoods, but politically dominated by the Breton nationalist "red cap" movement organised by Breton employers' organizations.

Workers fighting plant closures and sackings went to Quimper to protest against PS policies. They did not attend the rival, pro-government demonstration organised by the Left Front in Carhaix on the same day,

which drew less than 1,000 and had the support of the Stalinist CGT (General Confederation of Labour) unions.

On November 13, PCF spokesman Olivier Dartigolles acknowledged that "never has such a degree of discontent and exasperation been felt." He acknowledged that the Left Front "isn't seen today as a possible alternative...It is embroiled in a polemic about the municipal elections, which does not fit in with people's preoccupations."

In Paris and other municipalities the PCF has chosen an alliance with the PS over the Left Party, its much smaller partner. Thus, on the basis of alliances with the PS, Dartigolles says that the mission is to "make a success of the mobilisations at the end of the month...It's not inevitable that this exasperation should become the soil for chaos."



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