

Summer schools of France's Socialist and Left Parties prepare swing to the right

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Facing growing popular anger with their austerity policies, the ruling Socialist Party (PS) and its satellite, the Left Front (FG), are attempting to establish political mechanisms to allow the ruling elite to intensify its attacks on the working class.

During the PS and FG Summer Schools held last weekend in the towns of La Rochelle and Toulouse, respectively, both parties presented projects for political regroupments in the form of new alliances based on right-wing politics.

The schools took place amid the crisis in Greece, which has exposed not only the brutality of European Union (EU) policy, supported by President François Hollande of the PS, but also the reactionary character of the Greek government led by Syriza, an ally of the Left Front. Greek prime minister Alexis Tsipras has imposed brutal austerity measures on Greek workers.

Throughout the PS summer school, the party's leaders continued to distance themselves from the empty, discredited pretensions of this big business party that it has anything to do with socialism.

In a speech applauded by PS dignitaries at La Rochelle, French prime minister Manuel Valls defended the government's austerity policies and the attacks against democratic rights with hollow rhetoric about the "values" of the "left". He wrapped his party's austerity measures in banal promises to eliminate the remaining "constraints" on businesses' exploitation of workers. Valls said, "We can get rid of these constraints whilst still protecting, that is the Left!"

He summed up his priorities as being "January 11" (the *Charlie Hebdo* shootings to which his government replied by bringing in the army and attacking democratic rights in the name of the "war on terror") and the "return of growth" (that is, new austerity

policies to cut workers' social security benefits).

Valls justified putting labour laws on hold and imposing "company agreements", promoted by the Medef, the French Employers Federation, and the government. These would allow unlimited exploitation of workers through hostile measures proposed by the employers.

Valls accompanied this with appeals to national chauvinism. According to him, one had "to be proud of this Left who fights for the nation, the homeland and secularism" and "who has no lesson to take from anyone on the question of security". He criticised the neo-fascist National Front from the right for not lacking patriotism by refusing to support the recent law increasing the French State's intelligence powers.

He hailed the imposition of EU austerity by Syriza in Greece as a "political and ethical lesson for all the Lefts throughout Europe". He promised "his entire support to Alexis Tsipras" for having "made the choice to reform rather than sidestep the problem".

An article on the PS's Summer School on the *Mediapart* news site stressed the absence of any references to socialism, social issues, or reformism: "Now one talks only about economic efficiency, of globalisation and competition, of secularism or republican order.... In fact it's as if the transition to a democratic party (in the Italian or American sense of the word) from socialism has been completed without ever being decreed."

At La Rochelle, the PS leaders opened the way for alliances including not only the party's existing periphery, but also right-wing parties. PS general secretary Jean-Christophe Cambadélis presented a plan for a "Grand Popular Alliance," whilst Valls put forward a "Rally of all Progressives".

Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Left Party (PG) and the FG of

which it is a part have also been largely discredited by their support for Syriza, Syriza's abject betrayal of all its promises in the Greek parliamentary elections in January, and finally its implementation of all the diktats of the troika.

Whilst still spreading illusions about Tsipras and his party, Mélenchon and the PG are sliding towards support for Popular Unity, an organisation that just emerged from Syriza but is just as compromised, having participated in Syriza's attacks on the workers.

Mélenchon is also trying to promote former Greek finance minister Yanis Varoufakis as an opponent of austerity. He has announced a debate with Varoufakis and the ex-president of Die Linke (the Left Party in Germany), Oskar Lafontaine, at "la Fête de l'Humanité" of the French Communist Party (PCF, another component of FG) in two weeks' time.

Whilst continuing to spread illusions that Syriza might renegotiate the austerity package, Mélenchon presented as an alternative the perspective of a "Plan B". This would involve France leaving the euro and returning to the French franc currency.

Mélenchon is putting forward ever more openly a perspective of promoting French national sovereignty that brings him closer to the néofascists and "sovereignty-ists" such as ex-PS official Jean-Pierre Chevènement and the right-winger Nicolas Dupont-Aignan.

By itself, exiting the euro does not mean less austerity than staying in the euro zone. Mélenchon's "Plan B" implies austerity, control on the movement of capital in and out of the country, the closing of frontiers and the mobilisation of the security forces. In Greece, it was Varoufakis who had prepared such a "Plan B".

Mélenchon also presented a plan for a reorganisation of the periphery of the PS. He called for an alliance with the "rebels" of the PS—those PS deputies that are the most hostile to Berlin's policy from a nationalist standpoint, whilst supporting Hollande's austerity—the Ecologist Party (Europe Ecology the Greens, which was in government with the PS until a year ago) and the Stalinist PCF, the principal partner of the Left Party in the FG.

Beyond simply building a temporary alliance for the coming election cycles, Mélenchon hopes to constitute an organisation similar to Syriza in Greece or Podemos in Spain.

Before the summer school, he said: "We want citizens' assemblies that are directly associated with the preparation of the lists and the programmes, as Podemos has done in Spain, rather than leave this to the cartel of parties. In any case, there is no member of the Left Party on a list with the PS."

Mélenchon wants to bring the PCF into this initiative, according to *Le Monde*: "Mr. Mélenchon stresses that these agreements must not be made without the PCF, 'But the communists must make an effort', he slipped in, this Sunday on the platform."

Trying to pass off organisational abstinence with regard to the PS as opposition to the austerity policies of the financial aristocracy imposed by Hollande is political skulduggery.

To present Podemos as an alternative is purely and simply fraudulent. Podemos is a pseudo-left party whose programme is similar to Syriza's. Both of them represent the interests of the well-off middle class, which wants a larger, "fairer" share of the profits extracted from the working class. Podemos has supported Syriza from beginning to end.

Mélenchon, who defends the interests of the same social layers in France, attempts to develop the same anti-worker politics, on the basis of a policy of a "controlled" exit from the euro and the re-establishment of a national currency. His project of a "Union of Left Opposition" is no less reactionary than the "Grand Popular Alliance" of Cambadélis.



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