

# Left Party founder Jean-Luc Mélenchon covers for French government's authoritarian policies

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After the resignation of Justice Minister Christiane Taubira, who was functioning as a symbolic internal opposition to the police-state policies of the Socialist Party (PS) government, the Left Front leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon is peddling illusions that forces in and around the PS will suddenly turn to the left.

In an interview in the *Journal du Dimanche*, Mélenchon criticised the replacement of Taubira, who had publicly stated her disagreement with President François Hollande's deprivation of nationality policy, with Jean-Jacques Urvoas.

He said, "Christiane Taubira's departure is a spectacular step in the process of sectarian isolation of François Hollande. He divides everything and everyone: the social movement, the left, his own government. Now, he has named as justice minister someone who has proposed to merge the justice and interior ministries, and who said the PS 'rebel' opposition to Hollande were 'jihadists'. Taubira left, disgusted. Now that everyone who was disgusted has left, only the disgusting ones remain."

This is simply an attempt to promote the minority of forces in and around the PS who, since the November 13 terror attacks, have cynically postured as critics of Hollande's authoritarian policies. However, no fundamental difference separates Taubira from the reactionary policy of the PS government, which aims to create a police state in France.

Taubira opposed Hollande and Prime Minister Manuel Valls on the question of the revision of the French constitution in order to make the current state of emergency permanent, and to allow the state to strip a French citizen of his nationality. This latter was another key step towards the formation of an authoritarian state

in France, as the deprivation of nationality policy is taken from the program of the neo-fascist National Front (FN).

Nonetheless, they all agree on the wars waged by France and its allies in the Middle East, where the Islamist fighters that carried out the attacks were trained, and on the state of emergency.

Taubira herself stressed in an interview with *Le Monde* that she does not oppose Hollande: "I am not seeking to establish myself as an opposition. I left the government because of a serious political disagreement. ... But I want to be clear: I deeply respect the presidential office. When a society is in doubt and feels fragile, the institutions must be strong and powerful."

Mélenchon's attempt to present forces like Taubira or the Left Front itself as an opposition to Hollande is deeply cynical. He has worked with the people he called the "disgusting ones" for decades and helped elect them in 2012, as he admits: "We helped elect François Hollande to get rid of [conservative President Nicolas] Sarkozy's policies. A year before the end of Hollande's term in office, on all counts—above all unemployment—are worse than under Sarkozy."

Indeed, Mélenchon helped elect Hollande knowing full well what policies he would carry out. During the 2012 election campaign, he called Hollande "Hollandréou," that is, a supporter of Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou's austerity policies, making clear that he knew Hollande's promises to "attack" the world of finance were lies.

Mélenchon is a highly experienced bourgeois politician, a former student radical in Pierre Lambert's petty-bourgeois *Organisation Communiste Internationaliste*, who then worked inside the PS from

1976 to 2009. It was during the PS' "austerity turn" under the presidency of François Mitterrand that he became senator, working with Mitterrand to help coordinate the party's strategy. In 1997, he became a minister under the unpopular Plural Left government of Prime Minister Lionel Jospin.

His attempts to distance himself from the PS' current far-right turn are political smoke and mirrors. He is an admirer of Mitterrand, a former official of the Nazi-collaborationist Vichy regime, who kept his ties with pro-Vichy business circles and top Vichy officials like its chief of police, René Bousquet. Before the Hollande campaign, Mélenchon also developed friendships with right-wing figures known for their nostalgia for the pre-World War II fascist *Action française*, such as Eric Zemmour, Patrick Buisson, and Henri Guaino.

While he associated with these forces, Mélenchon was calling for a Hollande vote, fully conscious that, once in power, he would disappoint the workers and create the conditions for a rise of the FN. Once Hollande was in office, Mélenchon served as a "left" cover to block opposition to Hollande from the left, in the working class.

After the November 13 attacks, his Left Front voted for the state of emergency at the National Assembly. Mélenchon called the measure "fully justified in the initial hours after the November massacre, because it allowed for rapid police interventions."

Mélenchon was thus supporting the state of emergency and helping legitimise the installation of a police state in which intelligence and law enforcement have virtually unlimited powers to search and detain individuals without judicial approval, and basic democratic rights are suspended. The state of emergency permitted mass deployments of police and soldiers in the streets of France, the banning of demonstrations, and the jailing of Goodyear workers for striking in defence of their jobs.

Mélenchon's unparalleled cynicism expresses the profound corruption of an entire layer of the affluent middle class, influenced by the post-1968 student movement and terrified by the rising disillusionment of the masses with the PS. Fearing the emergence of an opposition movement on their left in the working class, they feel quite convinced when they hear Valls declare that there is "no alternative on the left" to the PS.

Thus Mélenchon tells the *Journal du Dimanche*,

"Hollande has managed to discredit the very idea of the 'left' itself. Today, people have lost their political bearings, they see right and left as two blocs with the same politics. The rupture is more between the people and the caste of the powerful. In France, poverty has become silent, no one speaks in its name."

In fact, the central question is building an alternative on the left of the PS, because all the parties currently claiming to be "left" are consciously hostile to the principle of equality that historically is at the heart of all left-wing politics.

In 2014, in his book *The era of the people*, Mélenchon declared the end of socialism, the working class, and the left, and advanced a nationalist populism. The PS' evolution shows that what this reactionary form of politics has accomplished is to create an atmosphere in which the PS can rehabilitate the policies of the Vichy regime.



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