

Left Front promotes French regime-change operation in oil-rich Gabon

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The Left Front's Jean-Luc Mélenchon is backing the Socialist Party (PS) government's regime-change operation in Gabon on Saturday, appearing at a small protest in Paris of supporters of Jean Ping, the French-backed candidate who lost the presidential election to the incumbent, Ali Bongo.

Mélenchon marched with protesters draped in yellow, the Ping campaign's official colour, and brandishing signs saying "Down with Bongo" and "Free Gabon." He told AFP that he joined the protest to "congratulate the Gabonese people for resisting," and that he considered it "unacceptable to massacre those that only want free and democratic elections."

What a cynical fraud! To liberate themselves, the workers and oppressed masses of Gabon face a struggle not only against Ali Bongo, but his imperialist backers—above all, France, the former colonial power in Gabon, and its handpicked candidate. Ping is a member of Gabon's kleptocratic ruling clique, which has controlled Gabon ever since Ali's father Omar came to power based on a French military intervention in 1965.

Ping is the ex-husband of Ali's sister Pascaline, who oversaw Omar Bongo's financial affairs. He had a front row seat as French oil companies and political parties sucked billions of euros from the country, leaving the masses mired in poverty.

Mélenchon is backing Ping as a representative of French imperialism: the PS government and its satellites like the Left Front plan for Ping to maintain these relations, and cut off Ali Bongo's promotion of Gabon's economic ties to China. In this, the Left Front are not disinterested observers. The PS, and thus its allies in the Left Front, directly benefited from these vast, politically criminal cash flows that came to light in a series of scandals in the 1990s and 2000s, such as the Elf Aquitaine affair.

These links continue to surface. A confidential memo by the US embassy in Yaoundé dated July 7, 2009, released by WikiLeaks and reprinted in the Spanish daily *El País*, notes payments to the main French political parties at the time, the PS and the UMP (now The Republicans, LR). The payments were made by top Gabonese officials at the Bank of Central African States (BEAC), who embezzled the money from the bank on Ali Bongo's orders.

It is not difficult to understand the role Mélenchon is playing. As the PS and Ping try to exploit Ali Bongo's crackdown against the Ping campaign to topple his regime, Mélenchon is bringing the benediction of the academics, union functionaries and middle-class professionals of the Left Front to a French coup that would install Ping as Gabon's new autocrat.

The demonstration that Mélenchon joined featured prominent demands for yet another military intervention by France in Gabon, in order to topple Ali Bongo. In a press statement, the groups who had organized the protest called upon "France, which has a military base in Gabon, and upon the international community, to join together with the Gabonese people to put an end to Ali Bongo's homicidal lunacy."

This is simply an attempt by the Left Front and pro-imperialist sections of the Gabonese community in France to give a "left" face to reactionary demands for the ongoing French-led intervention in Gabon to escalate into a military putsch.

As the WSWWS has already reported, the French PS reacted to the election in Gabon by demanding immediately, before any recount had taken place, that Bongo hand over power to Ping. "It has been a half century that the Bongo family has ruled Gabon," it declared. "Handing over power would be a sign of good faith and would provide a good example to

follow.”

This was followed by an escalating series of demands for regime-change from the Ping campaign. On Friday, Ping proclaimed himself president at a press conference. Present were a number of Ping’s supporters, just released from police custody after a siege by Special Forces and police of Ping’s electoral headquarters, after his supporters partially burned down the National Assembly on Wednesday night. One was an ex-vice president and two were ex-ministers of Omar Bongo—with Ping, all part of the faction of the ruling clique that has fallen out with Ali Bongo.

Ever since the declaration of the election results neither the French nor the American governments, nor the European Union or the African Union has issued a statement accepting Ali Bongo’s re-election. Behind the scenes, intense pressure is being brought to bear on the regime from Washington and Paris. In his calls for a vote recount, Ping always stresses that he is only echoing the demands of France, the EU, the United States and the African Union.

On Saturday, as Mélenchon marched in support of the French regime-change operation, Ping and a number of his followers called on President François Hollande to intervene in Gabon. On Monday, Ping called for a general strike in Gabon, and yesterday Justice Minister Séraphin Moundounga, a long time stalwart of Ali Bongo’s regime, suddenly announced his resignation.

There can be little doubt that Mélenchon was well-informed as to what was taking place. He is a former PS senator and top aide to the late PS President François Mitterrand during the 1980s and 1990s. Since 1983 at least, he has been a member of the Freemasonry, a reactionary network that recruits extensively among the bloodstained ruling personnel of the dictatorships of Francophone Africa.

During his 2003 trial in the Elf Aquitaine affair, French oil boss Loïk Le Floch-Prigent detailed Mitterrand’s policy on African oil after coming to power in 1981, when Mélenchon was working closely with him. PS officials and ex-1960s student radicals, like Mélenchon and Le Floch-Prigent made clear, they simply sought to secure for themselves a share of the booty that had traditionally been pillaged from Gabon and other African countries by the French right.

“This system existed essentially for the Gaullist party, the RPR,” Le Floch-Prigent said. “I informed

President François Mitterrand, who told me that it would be better to spread it about a bit, without leaving out the RPR all the same.”

These corrupt social-democratic and pseudo-left parties, which view workers in Africa and Europe with the same fear and contempt as the personnel of the Bongo regime, are now launching yet another regime-change operation in Africa, under totally fraudulent “democratic” pretences.

Ping’s intervention in the elections was prepared in talks with top French officials whom he met in Paris last October. Ping spoke with PS First Secretary Jean-Christophe Cambadélis, Senator Jean-Pierre Cantegrit, President Hollande’s Africa adviser Hélène Le Gal, diplomat Jean-Christophe Belliard, and Ibrahima Diawadoh, Prime Minister Manuel Valls’ Africa adviser.

Once Ping had Paris’s approval, he set about securing the support of the Gabonese United Front opposition coalition. The opposition had set January 27, 2016 as the date of the meeting to decide how to designate its candidate for the presidential elections. Ping hastily organised a meeting on January 15 and had himself elected candidate, declaring shortly thereafter that he was “going to be the next President of the Gabonese Republic.”



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