

Mélenchon refuses to take a position in French presidential runoff

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In a 30-minute video posted on his blog Friday, Unsubmissive France (UF) leader and defeated presidential candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon decided to take no position on the May 7 presidential runoff between neo-fascist candidate Marine Le Pen and ex-banker Emmanuel Macron.

This is a cowardly evasion of political responsibility. Mélenchon won nearly 20 percent of the vote and carried cities including Marseille, Toulouse, Lille and the working-class northern suburbs of Paris. He spoke yesterday as youth in cities across France protested the dead end of an election between a neo-fascist and an ex-minister of the current Socialist Party (PS) government who supports the state of emergency, deep austerity and a return of the draft.

Under these conditions, the Parti de l'égalité socialiste (PES) has called for an active boycott of the election, to mobilize the explosive political opposition and social anger in the working class against whichever reactionary candidate wins the runoff.

Mélenchon, however, made clear that he would participate in the May 7 vote, but stressed that he would keep his vote a secret from the UF movement's Internet membership so they would not feel betrayed by the decision he took. He indicated only that he would not vote for Le Pen.

"I will go vote," he said, and continued: "But as for whom I will vote, I will not tell you. You don't have to be a great genius to figure out what I will do. But why won't I tell you? So that you can stay grouped together... So that each one of you, whatever decision he takes, can feel comfortable about the vote he cast for me in the presidential election, can feel proud of his vote, can feel that he was not betrayed by his candidate."

Mélenchon, who like Macron is a former PS minister,

added that had the UF membership consisted of longtime political allies, he could have told them what he would do. However, Mélenchon said, the UF voter base is divided between supporters of a Macron vote and forces opposed to both Macron and Le Pen, and he could not take any position without dividing his movement.

He declared, "Maybe if we had spent 10 years in politics together, in the movement, for 15 years, maybe I could say, 'OK my friends, this is what I'm doing.' We would be close enough to each other, in some sense, for me to be able to confide in you, but now I must not do that. If I do it, I will divide you."

What emerges inescapably from Mélenchon's comments is that he has no independent political line whatsoever.

Whatever he intends to do in the voting booth, whether it is to vote for Macron or cast a blank ballot, his silence is bankrupt. Were he to support Macron, in line with his ex-comrades in the PS leadership, his campaign promises to oppose free-market policies and militarism would be exposed as so many political lies. If, in fact, he intends to silently cast a blank ballot because he considers himself opposed to both Le Pen and Macron, this is an admission of political impotence.

The call by the PES for a boycott and opposition to both candidates means fighting to organize a mass political movement in the working class against whichever candidate wins. It means appealing to the deep social opposition in the working class to austerity, turning to the 70 percent of the population that opposed the PS labor law and now opposes the choice between Le Pen and Macron. It means rejecting and exposing the endless lying and political blackmail in the media, which is seeking to discredit left-wing opposition to

Macron by claiming that it is allied to the neo-fascists.

The PES is fighting for this line among workers and youth and explaining that it requires a revolutionary, socialist and internationalist perspective for a struggle against the ruthless opposition such an offensive will provoke in the ruling class in France and internationally.

Mélenchon's proposals, on the other hand, are shot through with insoluble contradictions. Having effectively admitted that UF was too deeply divided to even take a position on Macron's campaign, he turned around and claimed that it was a "stable and united force" that could do well in the June legislative elections and serve as a beacon for France.

"We are in an extremely tense situation, violence is being done to most of us," he said. "And from this violence, a stable situation cannot emerge, because the very nature of the protagonists of the second round rules out such stability: one is extreme finance, the other is the extreme right."

He declared that UF is therefore "an asset for our country, because whoever wins the second round, we will be dealing with someone whose program will divide everyone and create an incredible mess in this country."

Mélenchon, a former PS minister with extensive contacts in the intelligence and security services going back to his period as a top assistant to PS President François Mitterrand in the 1980s, is well aware of the explosive social situation in France and across Europe. What he is proposing is not a left-wing policy to mobilize the working class in struggle, however. Rather, he is advancing vague, desperate hopes that parliamentary combinations involving UF could somehow deal with whichever reactionary takes over France's all-powerful presidency.

His proposal amounts to this: anyone looking to build a left-wing opposition to both Macron and Le Pen should remain trapped within an organization so divided and dependent on official public opinion that it cannot even take a position on Macron's presidential bid. This display of impotence will only provide an opening for the populist demagoguery of Le Pen, who yesterday issued her own video appeal to UF voters to back her in the May 7 runoff.

Mélenchon concluded by describing his strategy of deliberate ambiguity about Macron as the common

position of UF and large sections of the trade union bureaucracy, noting that the General Confederation of Labor (CGT), Workers Force (FO) and Solidarity unions have the same approach. He discussed the upcoming consultative vote of the UF Internet membership to determine what position to take in the runoff, but only to make clear that this vote will have no real significance.

"The consultative vote will not have the weight of a decision," he said. "We will give a picture, we will say here is what UF members are thinking. I hope many of you will go vote. We will say here is what the UF members think. We will not say there is a majority, a minority, one won out over the other, because we are not a party."

Translated into plain English, this means that UF members can vote however they please, but Mélenchon and the UF leadership are determined not to take up a struggle. Such remarks point to the reactionary implications of Mélenchon's postmodernist claims, advanced in books like *The Era of the People*, that the era of socialism, of a politically independent role for the working class, of the left, and of political parties is over. As the PES has warned, these claims indicate Mélenchon's essential hostility to building a revolutionary movement in the working class.

Instead of being politically organized in a disciplined vanguard party, workers and students turning to the left are to be trapped in loose, semi-anarchistic and impotent groupings led by practiced bourgeois politicians. Mélenchon's statement today underscores that this perspective does not open a way forward for social struggle, but strangles it.

The alternative for masses of people looking for a way to struggle against Macron and Le Pen is not Mélenchon, but the building of the PES as the French section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and the Trotskyist vanguard of the working class in France.



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