

Mélenchon repeats offer to serve as the prime minister of France under Macron

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On Saturday, Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Unsubmissive France (UF) movement held a convention in the Paris suburb of Villejuif to launch its campaign for the legislative elections of June 11 and 18.

Despite a raft of polls showing UF obtaining just 14 percent of the vote, down substantially from Mélenchon's 19.6 percent showing in the presidential elections, Mélenchon asserted that UF will be able to "govern the country." That is, he was repeating his offer, made between the two rounds of the presidential elections, to serve as prime minister under France's newly elected president, Emmanuel Macron.

Mélenchon won a substantial following in the first round of the French presidential election by presenting himself as an opponent of war and social inequality. But Saturday's convention starkly illustrated the class gulf separating Mélenchon's call for a parliamentary deal with President Emmanuel Macron from the campaign by the *Parti de l'égalité socialiste* (PES) for an active boycott of the second round of the presidential elections, to politically prepare a mobilization of workers in struggle against Macron.

In a one-hour speech to delegates, Mélenchon declared: "Unsubmissive France is proposing to the voters to organize a new political cohabitation to defeat Macronist politics. We can do, it is within our grasp, may the happy days come!" The word "cohabitation" is the term used for a situation in which the president and the prime minister are from different parties. He added, "We are running candidates everywhere with the objective of governing the country and constituting a new parliamentary majority."

As prime minister, Mélenchon explained, he could help guide Macron in the implementation of his policies: "We must show that this young man needs to be tempered in his follies by the steady hand of a wise man who knows on what side the happiness of the people is to be found," he added.

Mélenchon is sowing absurd illusions in Macron. Macron's program of deep austerity and militarism is not the product of personal folly, but of the crisis of capitalism. A former Socialist Party (PS) government minister and executive of the Rothschild bank, Macron advances a program representing the interests of the most powerful sections of the ruling class: the banks, the military and the intelligence agencies. Yet Mélenchon proposes only an impotent plan to offer Macron "wise" advice, reassuring everyone that he knows how to make the people happy.

This policy is the direct continuation of Mélenchon's backhanded support for Macron after the first round of the presidential elections. The PES called for an active boycott of a second round between Macron and neo-fascist National Front (FN) candidate Marine Le Pen, warning that Macron would no less than Le Pen impose police-state policies, austerity and war. Even though his supporters overwhelmingly voted to boycott the elections, he refused to say how he planned to vote in the second round, insisting that supporters of Macron and of a boycott could both remain in his organisation.

Mélenchon's cowardly abdication of his political responsibility to his voters is designed to lay a political trap for the working class. There is explosive social anger in France and across Europe, with two-thirds of the French population saying that the class struggle is a daily reality of life and 64 percent of French youth opposing plans to restore the draft. Mélenchon aims to lead the growing disquiet and anger among workers over Macron into the dead end of a bankrupt parliamentary perspective.

It is widely understood that Macron will maintain the state of emergency, which suspends democratic rights in France, and use it to impose deeply unpopular social policies. Macron is vowing to slash corporate taxes and impose EU austerity policies by fiat, using the framework provided by last year's labour law, which was imposed in

the face of mass protests and the opposition of 70 percent of the population.

Under these conditions, even Mélenchon felt compelled to make a few criticisms of Macron. He complained that Macron wanted “emergency powers” to ram his policies through parliament via decree: “The first Macron will ask for from his deputies is the authorisation to rule by decree, that is, that they submit to him.”

Holding out wild hopes that voters would return a UF majority to the National Assembly, he insisted that a parliamentary struggle against Macron is still viable. If voters gave “a majority to UF, then you will have a majority that applies UF’s program, A Future in Common.”

In fact, it is impossible to obtain even the fairly mild social concessions proposed in the UF election program under a Macron presidency. Macron is committed not only to deep austerity and to the state of emergency, but also to a major military build-up, including a return to the draft, which Mélenchon also supported during the presidential election campaign. Social funding would be simply unavailable under Macron, as he poured countless billions of euros into preparing to join major NATO wars in the Middle East, Africa and Eastern Europe.

An essential contradiction underlies the bankruptcy of Mélenchon’s program. He proposes to obtain under capitalism various concessions—wage increases, funding for students, etc.—that are listed in his program, but that cannot be obtained without the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and the building of socialism across Europe and internationally. While he tries to present himself as radical because he advances social demands, he is in fact desperately trying to tie the working class to a bankrupt bourgeois parliamentary perspective.

This is rooted in Mélenchon’s political history and in particular his hostility to Trotskyism. He joined the *Organisation communiste internationaliste* (OCI) as it was breaking with the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), whose French section today is the PES, on a reactionary nationalist perspective of building the PS, which had been founded in 1971. The OCI integrated itself deeply into the PS and its political periphery.

One OCI member, Lionel Jospin, served concurrently as a leading PS member and became a top aide to PS President François Mitterrand and then prime minister of France. Jospin led the 1997-2002 Plural Left government—comprising the PS, the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF), and the Green Party—which

“cohabited” with conservative President Jacques Chirac. Mélenchon was a PS minister in the Jospin government, whose reactionary policies proved deeply unpopular.

At the Villejuif convention, Mélenchon baldly advanced the perspective that UF voters should allow him to follow in Jospin’s footsteps, by setting up a fruitful cohabitation between himself and Macron. He said, “Whatever criticisms one has to make of it, the cohabitation of Lionel Jospin for five years was one of the most positive moments in the life of the French economy.”

Mélenchon’s characterization of the Plural Left government as positive testifies to his hostility to the working class. Jospin carried out a series of austerity measures, including mass redundancies and the privatization of many public enterprises, and participated in the Afghan war. The ultimate outcome was a humiliating defeat for Jospin in the first round of the presidential election of 2002, as Jospin and the PS were eliminated in the first round, setting up a second round between Jean-Marie Le Pen and Chirac.

As in 2017 with Macron, Mélenchon and the political descendants of the OCI supported Chirac against Le Pen in 2002. Over the last 15 years, their bankrupt policies have only produced disasters for the workers. They shifted further to the right: backing austerity, war and police-state measures, while allowing the FN to continue to rise in the polls, doubling its vote between 2002 and 2017 and becoming a major force in the political establishment.

Mélenchon’s positions confirm yet again the correctness of the PES call for an active boycott in the second round of the election, to give an independent political line to workers and arm them politically with a revolutionary and socialist perspective for the mass struggles that will erupt against Macron and the EU. The forces that, like Mélenchon, seek to keep the working class trapped in the dead end of parliamentary politics are utterly bankrupt. They have nothing to propose but illusions and political lies.



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