

In French legislative elections, Mélenchon moves closer to Macron

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Less than two weeks before the first round of the French legislative elections, the perspective for opposition to President Emmanuel Macron's agenda offered by Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the leader of Unsubmissive France (UF), is collapsing. This is what emerges from an examination of his interview Tuesday in *Le Parisien*.

Though he received 7 million votes in the presidential elections based on criticisms of war, Mélenchon rejected a revolutionary policy of mobilizing the working class in struggle against the new president. Though most of his supporters rejected both Macron and neo-fascist candidate Marine Le Pen, he refused to call for a boycott—the policy advanced by the *Parti de l'égalité socialiste* (PES). In a naked abdication of political responsibility, Mélenchon refused to take any position on the second round of the presidential election.

Instead, he proposed a parliamentary strategy—claiming, despite all evidence to the contrary, that UF would win the legislative elections and form a government, so Mélenchon could carry out a militant struggle against Macron from inside the prime minister's office. This week, however, Mélenchon is increasingly dropping these pretenses and shifting rapidly to the right. He made clear in *Le Parisien* that he is preparing to operate as a minority in the National Assembly and provide friendly advice on Macron's legislative agenda.

With UF set to poll only 12 percent, down from 20 percent in the presidential election, Mélenchon said, “if my movement does not get a majority, I will act as leader of the opposition in the country,” which, Mélenchon admitted, is “a powder keg.” That is, he is peddling illusions that he can obtain concessions from Macron even if UF has only a handful of deputies in the

Assembly.

Mélenchon said he would meet Macron's justice minister, François Bayrou, to discuss the planned anti-corruption law for the “moralization” of French politics: “We will propose alternatives and adopt a conquering position. I must see Mr Bayrou tomorrow, Wednesday. I will propose a simple measure, giving the people the power to remove elected officials. It's in my programme. If he takes it up, I will say congratulations and vote for the law! If he does not, we will wait to see what is in it.”

The purpose of such a meeting is to provide political cover for empty pro-Macron propaganda in the press, which claims Macron is renewing French politics and purging it of financial corruption. This came as this propaganda hit its first major obstacle: allegations that Macron aide and urban planning minister Richard Ferrand improperly benefited in real estate deals six years ago, while running a public insurance fund in Brittany.

In *Le Parisien*, Mélenchon went on to make clear that his movement would work with the Macron government in the National Assembly, particularly if Macron's REM won a legislative majority. “If it's Mr Macron who wins, we will propose the formation of a true Popular Front of social resistance that makes propositions,” Mélenchon said.

Mélenchon is well aware that Macron intends to impose his programme—calling for deep cuts to jobs and social benefits by decree, major increases to military spending, and a return to the draft—in an authoritarian manner, by decree, under the state of emergency. This programme is overwhelmingly unpopular in France, and particularly in the working class. With social anger mounting in France and across Europe, Mélenchon knows he must prepare for an eruption of the class

struggle.

He told *Le Parisien*: “If [Macron] wins, I predict that he will rapidly face a very violent rejection of a part of society. Because the tax increases and the super-labour law that he wants to do to undermine the Labour Code will produce a social shock of the very greatest magnitude.”

Mélenchon’s programme is not, however, to oppose the state of emergency and arm the workers with a perspective for the explosive and bitter struggles that lie ahead. Rather, he insisted that social opposition had to be channelled through UF deputies in the National Assembly. “We will work with trade unions, NGOs, political and cultural forces,” he said. “The resistance will start first of all in the National Assembly.”

A class gulf separates the PES, the French section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), from the perspective laid out by Mélenchon. The PES called for an active boycott of the Macron-Le Pen run-off to offer an independent political line for the working class and warn it of the reactionary, militaristic, and anti-democratic policies Macron would pursue in office. It oriented to the development of revolutionary opposition to war and austerity in the working class and sought to give it a socialist and internationalist perspective.

Already, only weeks after Macron’s election, a strike by tanker drivers has begun in France. Yet Mélenchon, like the trade union bureaucracies, is not calling for a broader struggle of the working class in support of the drivers, but seeking to negotiate adjustments in Macron’s policies. There is only one way to correctly describe this strategy: it is a trap for the working class.

Mélenchon does not represent an alternative to Macron or the discredited Socialist Party (PS) of former President François Hollande, but a faction of this discredited ruling elite. An ex-student radical who joined the petty-bourgeois *Organisation communiste internationaliste* (OCI) after it broke with Trotskyism and the ICFI in 1971 on the perspective of helping to build the PS, Mélenchon then joined the PS. In the 1980s, he became a senator, then a minister, with high-level connections to intelligence and military circles.

The forces with which Mélenchon would form his supposed alliance against Macron, such as the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF), have decades-long ties to the PS and do not oppose Macron—as Mélenchon

himself well knows. In fact, amid factional struggles with the PCF over whether to run a joint legislative slate, Mélenchon sent an SMS to the PCF leadership denouncing them as tools of Macron.

He wrote, “You are creating confusion across the entire country ... Bravo, ‘communist identity.’ All that after months of insults and manoeuvres to sabotage my campaign. And you’re at it again. You are death and nothingness. You took 10 months to support me and 10 minutes to support Macron. And that’s without mentioning the agreements you don’t respect. I’ve had enough.”

Now, however, Mélenchon is proposing to form a regroupment of the entire upper-middle class milieu of trade union bureaucrats, NGO officials, and media and political operatives of which the PCF is an integral part—but supposedly in order to oppose Macron. This is a political fraud.

Workers must be warned: despite his occasionally radical-sounding rhetoric, Mélenchon is opposed to socialism and to any attempt to draw a political balance sheet of the bankruptcy of the PS. In his book *The Era of the People*, first published in 2014, he declared the end of socialism, the working class and the left, and advanced a populist nationalism. He opposed the construction of a left-wing movement based on the working class against capitalism.

The essential preparation for the struggles that are to come against Macron’s agenda of war and social reaction is a conscious political break with this demoralized and bankrupt perspective.



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