

Mélenchon hails French army as he launches movement against Macron's cuts

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The crisis that erupted after the resignation of French armed forces chief of staff General Pierre de Villiers has rapidly exposed the class character of Unsubmissive France (LFI). Shortly after launching LFI's movement against President Emmanuel Macron's drastic austerity policies, LFI leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon rapidly aligned himself with the financial demands de Villiers had made before resigning.

This underscores a basic political reality: the anti-Macron movement Mélenchon wants to build is a pro-war movement that would subordinate the interests of the working class to the strategic interests of French imperialism. But long historic experience shows one cannot defend workers' living standards by kowtowing to the generals. Explosive class struggles are being prepared against Macron, but workers' opposition will be expressed and can only find expression through struggles waged independently of Mélenchon and his allies.

Mélenchon is an unambiguous advocate of military spending and war. To the media, he denounced Macron's "enormous error" in proposing €850 million in defense budget cuts. He also applauded de Villiers' provocative statement to the National Assembly denouncing these cuts: "If his duty is to serve, his duty is also to say the reality of the situation. The head of state has created an extremely unhealthy situation between the army and the Nation, and I deplore this."

On his blog, Mélenchon demanded unstinting financial support for France's wars: "Whatever one thinks of the value of defense spending, whatever one thinks of the conflicts in which our armed forces are engaged, the duty of the country is to abide by these decisions. We cannot open up four military fronts without knowing who will finance them. Refusing to do so when men and women are engaged in combat threatens the entire system with dislocation, by showing it that its leaders themselves do not believe in the value of what they have decided."

Mélenchon's arguments are reactionary and false. It is not the "duty" of the French people to abide by neo-colonial wars launched behind their backs by small cabals leading the NATO alliance and a series of anti-working class governments in France who were impervious to anti-war sentiment.

The French army's wars—whether in the Middle East, where they participate in US-led coalitions, or in Africa where they try to maintain French imperialism's hegemony over its former colonial empire—are imperialist acts of plunder. The occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq, the wars in Syria and Libya or Mali have been bloody catastrophes.

Mélenchon's claim that everything must be done to prevent the "dislocation" of the army, by preserving the prestige and the massive financing of these politically criminal wars, shows that he is on the

side of the ruling elite against the workers in France and around the world. This is the political context in which the movement Mélenchon is proposing to launch against Macron's social counterrevolution can be understood.

Events since the French legislative elections last month have confirmed that the European Union (EU) and Macron are preparing a historic confrontation with the working class. An enabling act is to allow Macron to rewrite labor law by decree, to incorporate policies launched by the German social democrats against the German workers with the Hartz laws a decade ago. The writing of much of the state of emergency into common law would eliminate all judicial oversight of the police repression Macron is making preparations against the social opposition his attacks will undoubtedly provoke.

The giant step Macron is making towards a dictatorship in France vindicates the political line of the *Parti de l'égalité socialiste* (PES) in the French presidential elections. The PES rejected illusions that one could defend democratic and social rights by voting for Macron against the neo-fascist candidate Marine Le Pen; it called for an active boycott of the second round. The PES explained that only a politically independent line for the working class, opposed to the parties tied to Macron and the outgoing Socialist Party (PS), could prepare the workers for the struggles to come.

The four million blank or spoiled ballots cast in the presidential runoff, and the massive 57 percent abstention in the second round of the legislative elections, indicate the vast potential support for the positions of the PES in the working class.

Mélenchon for his part is continuing his policy in the presidential election—trying to channel mass opposition to both Macron and Le Pen toward a bankrupt, parliamentary perspective. Even after most LFI supporters indicated their support for a blank or spoiled ballot in the presidential runoff, Mélenchon did not call for a boycott. He refused to take any position; later he called on his voters to elect an LFI majority in the National Assembly so he could become Macron's prime minister.

After this stunning abdication of the responsibilities conferred upon Mélenchon by the 20 percent support he had received in the first round of the presidential election, LFI obtained only 15 deputies in the Assembly. On July 12, surrounded by the LFI deputies wearing tricolor sashes on Republic Square in Paris, Mélenchon called on his voters to launch a social movement. Its purpose, by Mélenchon's account, is to increase the parliamentary influence of the LFI minority, which Mélenchon sees as the sole legitimate political representation of the mass movement.

He said, "In August, we will have a national caravan. In September, of course, we will help the trade unions if they ask for it. And we will

have our own marches that will also take place ... You must prepare to act and interact with your parliamentarians, so osmosis occurs between the mass movement and the political representation that we are.”

He pointed to Macron’s decrees aiming to allow trade unions and bosses to negotiate firm-level contracts openly violating the national Labor Code: “You understand, that which was the particularity of the class struggle in France and of workers’ trade union actions and the great conquests, first of the beginning of the century when the Labor Code was first created, then of 1936, then of the Liberation, then of May 1968, then of May 1981 ... all of that, in a stroke of the pen, will be eliminated ... Everything will be overthrown in favor of micro-local agreements.”

There is no doubt that behind Macron, French and global finance capital is preparing a historic attack on the working class whose scale mirrors the scale of the crisis of capitalism. The hegemony of US imperialism, the unipolar power after the Stalinist bureaucracy’s dissolution of the USSR, is collapsing, as is the European Union (EU), discredited by its destructive and irrational austerity policy. And France, lacking in international competitiveness, is suffering an industrial and economic collapse to which the bourgeoisie is responding with dictatorial measures.

What does Mélenchon propose? He wants to use the population, mobilized in an artificial movement, as a back-up for a small, impotent minority in the National Assembly that openly sympathizes with the army. He will also coordinate with the trade union bureaucracies who, for their part, will organize a few protest marches without any perspective while negotiating the “trade union check” and other pseudo-legal bribes Macron is proposing to give them in his decrees.

This strategy is an absurdity that can only serve to demobilize the workers. Its main characteristic, as Mélenchon’s support for the army makes clear, is its national and parliamentary orientation, which signifies that it will be and can only be a brake on the development of struggles that will emerge in the working class in the coming months and years.

Macron’s attacks represent the implementation in France of social attacks carried out by the EU across Europe. Worked out in coordination with the German SPD, the labor law Macron is seeking to produce with his decrees aims to achieve what the EU imposed with its austerity policy in Greece: destroying all the gains the working class made through the class struggle in the 20th century.

These attacks will not fail to provoke explosive class struggles with revolutionary implications across Europe. Like the French general strikes in 1936 and 1968, or Europe’s liberation from fascist rule at the end of World War II, the struggles of the working class will emerge independently of the trade union bureaucracies and will rapidly overflow the borders of whichever individual country they begin in. In these struggles, the allies of workers in France are the workers of the rest of Europe and the world.

Mélenchon’s strategy is reactionary, since it cuts French workers off from their international class brothers and sisters and blocks a struggle of the working class for power. It currently has no chance of success, given LFI’s tiny minority in the Assembly. But even in Greece, where Mélenchon’s Syriza allies won the 2015 elections, their nationalism and their refusal to appeal to the European working class for support condemned Syriza’s opposition to impotence. It ultimately capitulated to the pressure of the banks and the EU, led by Berlin.

The conclusion drawn by Mélenchon in his anti-German pamphlet, *Bismarck’s Herring*, is that Paris must prepare for conflict with Berlin, including a military confrontation if necessary. “We are OK,” he wrote. “But we have the right to ask questions. Come on, we were invaded three times [by Germany] in less than a century. And now Germany has become the world’s third-largest exporter of weapons in less than 20 years.”

If Mélenchon defends de Villiers against Macron, it is in no small part because he opposes the Franco-German industrial alliance on military production proposed by Merkel and Macron last week. He applauds de Villiers for having opposed the project, which he denounces as a threat to France’s capacity to defend itself against Germany by maintaining a defense industry that is fully autonomous from Berlin.

On his blog, he wrote: “When ... the president presented an improbable plan for a military rapprochement with Germany, bitterness won out! ... We have already sold half the company that produces [France’s] Leclerc tanks to a family of German billionaires. We thought the total sell-out of our defense interests that characterized [PS President François] Hollande’s term in office would finally come to an end. But it turns out not to be the case. The armed forces, that will now be using German rifles, will tomorrow fly in airplanes whose production will also escape national control.”

These reactionary remarks bear a definite resemblance to the posturing of French bourgeois politicians of the 1930s who swore to struggle against Hitler, before abjectly capitulating to the Nazi invasion in 1940. They aim above all to divide the European working class and to inflame inter-imperialist tensions that twice in the past century erupted into world war in Europe.

Mélenchon’s political bankruptcy reflects the general collapse of the PS, European social democracy, and its broader periphery, which have been transformed into supporters of austerity and war. The specter of a revolutionary explosion now haunts Europe. The task the PES sets itself is, acting in coordination with the other sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International in Europe, is to give political leadership to unify these struggles across national boundaries into a revolutionary struggle for the overthrow of capitalism and the building of the United Socialist States of Europe.



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