

# In Paris, Mélenchon calls on trade unions to control opposition to austerity

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On Saturday, Jean-Luc Mélenchon's movement, Unsubmissive France (LFI, *La France Insoumise*), held its national rally in the Place de la République in Paris amid growing protests against President Emmanuel Macron's decrees scrapping the country's Labour Code. Between 30,000 and 150,000 people came to Paris for the protest. Whatever the precise number, the rally was noticeably smaller than the protest organised in Paris by the trade unions in the context of a national day of action on September 21.

WSWS reporters spoke to a number of the protesters in attendance. The rally was extremely heterogeneous, with many teachers, IT workers and youth having mobilised to protest Macron's decrees, which aim to destroy legal obstacles to unfair dismissal, wage and job cuts, and permanent temp contracts. Others joined the protest because they agreed with the perspective outlined by Mélenchon, who demanded that the union bureaucracy maintain its domination of workers' protests against Macron.

In his speech Mélenchon, wearing a patriotic tricolour sash, declared: "We are ready to rally behind them [the unions]. ... We are aware of the strength of the trade union organisations and of salaried workers." He sowed the illusion that thanks to his collaboration with the unions, the tiny LFI parliamentary group in the National Assembly could somehow block the adoption of the decrees. "The struggle is not finished, it is only beginning," he said.

The various union bureaucracies, however, have been working hand in glove with the government since Macron was elected in May. They are negotiating the decrees and preparing future attacks with Macron, while trying to stabilise Prime Minister Edouard Philippe's government by blocking the growing opposition of workers and youth to Macron's policies

of austerity and war. The unions are holding secret meetings with the government, and individual union bureaucrats are joining the staffs of various ministries.

Mélenchon's appeal to the unions to lead the protest thus signifies an attempt to strangle protests against the decrees and to give tacit support to Macron's reforms. Mélenchon is also working with the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA), the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF), and the former presidential candidate of the Socialist Party (PS), Benoît Hamon. They are preparing an alternate government for French imperialism, should the Philippe government collapse.

The alliance between Mélenchon and Hamon, whose Socialist Party was the first to include decrees like Macron's in early drafts of its labour laws in 2016, underscores the cynicism of Mélenchon's pose of opposition to the current president's austerity policies. He is not at all trying to break with the corrupt, anti-working class forces that have passed for the "left" in France since the 1968 general strike. Rather, following the collapse of the PS in the presidential elections in May of this year, Mélenchon is trying to regroup PS forces and its various allies into a new political tool for the ruling class.

The NPA participated in the rally in Place de la République, as did PCF national secretary Pierre Laurent and Hamon, who said he wanted "the mobilisation to continue." Philippe Poutou, the NPA's 2017 presidential candidate, called on Mélenchon: "Launch an appeal to everyone to start something, you've got the means to do it more than us."

Mélenchon responded, "I'm trying to find the right dose. I don't want to send you all into the wall." And by letting the unions "dose" the protests, that is, isolate them industry by industry and bottle them up in France alone despite growing social anger across Europe,

Mélenchon is working to block the emergence of a revolutionary, international struggle of the working class.

A certain proportion of the protesters were fairly open about supporting Mélenchon's reactionary and anti-worker perspective. They told WSWS reporters that they were not necessarily favourable to forcing the retraction of all of Macron's decrees, and insisted they did not want to discuss the link between Mélenchon and his Greek ally, the pro-austerity Syriza government of Alexis Tsipras.

Others said they were looking for a way to oppose Macron and the rising dangers of war internationally and dictatorship inside France. They were sceptical about the union protests and were waiting to see what Mélenchon would propose.

Ninon, a teacher, declared: "I think we have to call a stop to all these measures against the workers. I am in solidarity with the other workers, even if I am not the person who will be hit first in the public service. This is a government that is on the side of business, of big business and finance, not of the workers."

When the WSWS asked Ninon if she believed Mélenchon's perspective would allow him to change these policies, she replied: "In the short term, he can't, he is not in power. I don't believe in it so much, however. I'm waiting to see. Many people will be mobilised today and in October. I am convinced that the government will not back down. But I can't simply stay home, either."

Ninon also expressed her opposition to the state of emergency and dramatically expanded police and surveillance powers in France: "It should not last. But it will, we know it. It will always be a way to impose the laws rapidly, to spy on political opposition figures. I am against it. I do not think it is very effective in terms of fighting terrorism. That is not where the problem comes from."

She also condemned Trump's threats of nuclear war against North Korea: "It's quite clear. He [Trump] is crazy, he is dangerous, that's obvious. If it continues, there will be a very real danger."

Jocelyn, an IT student, said she was attending her first protest and that she opposed both Macron's labour decrees and the state of emergency, which, she said, "does not serve a useful purpose. ... It does not stop any attacks, I don't think. For me it's clear, it's a

dictatorship. In any case, the election was rigged, from the moment all the media started attacking all the candidates except Macron. He was being brought forward. From that moment on, you could see France isn't a democracy. ... It is a dictatorship, too."

Maximilien, a musicology student, also explained that he was demonstrating not only against the decrees, but also against the state of emergency and war: "I am absolutely against war. I don't know what to think about it. It is so sad that we have gotten this far. I'm for peace. That is one of the major reasons I am here today."

Laurent, an IT worker, pointed to the increasingly deep disenchantment of the French people with the established political parties: "We saw it in the legislative elections, there was an extraordinary level of abstention. Elections don't get people to go vote. ... I'm not an LFI member but it's one of the parties I feel closest to. But if tomorrow its proposals don't please me, I will leave."



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