

Why does Mélenchon want to expel Syriza from the European Left Party?

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Last week, the Left Party (PG), the small party founded by Jean-Luc Mélenchon within the Unsubmissive France (LFI) coalition, asked the national parties of the European Left Party (EL) coalition to exclude Syriza, (the “Coalition of the Radical Left”), Greece’s ruling party.

Since 2015, Syriza is trampling on its election promises to end European Union (EU) austerity and the Greek workers’ massive “no” vote in Syriza’s own July 2015 referendum on austerity. And in the years it has attacked the workers and imposed billions of euros in austerity measures, it functioned cordially as a key member of the EL coalition in the European parliament, and indeed Mélenchon hailed Syriza’s election in 2015 as a “historic” advance. Since mass strikes broke out against the last reactionary EU “multi-bill” rammed through by Syriza, however, the PG has changed its line.

After a January 28 meeting, the PG’s National Executive Secretariat issued a statement proposing to the EL to “place as quickly as possible on the order of the day the expulsion of Syriza.” It criticized the measures in Syriza’s latest austerity package aiming to eliminate the right to strike, inscribed in the Greek constitution in 1975.

“It has indeed become impossible to work side by side with Alexis Tsipras’ Syriza. He has gone so far in his logic of austerity as to ban the right to strike,” the PG adds. “The time is for clarity faced with the free-market straitjacket that is strangling the peoples, when virtually all the EL’s parties are struggling in their countries against such policies. The drama imposed on the Greek people, and elsewhere, can only cease in a European construction freed from the current treaties. The EL cannot include inside itself both the opponents and the supporters of such a Europe.”

This is rank hypocrisy. Syriza’s attack on the right to strike unambiguously demonstrates the authoritarian character of this party and its deep hostility to the working class. But this is only a particularly striking and undeniable example of the reactionary, nationalist and anti-worker policies pursued by all the EL parties. By criticizing Syriza amid growing strike militancy across Europe, the PG is

trying to mask the EL’s links to Syriza and to preserve the EL’s usefulness as a barrier to a revolutionary struggle by the working class in Europe.

The PG did not criticize Syriza in early January, when news broke that Syriza’s newest austerity package contained an attack on the right to strike, but only after workers took strike action against Syriza. Nor is its policy in France fundamentally different, from a class standpoint. The Left Front’s deputies voted for the state of emergency in the National Assembly in November 2015; this allowed the French state to suspend democratic rights and brutally repress workers who were trying to exercise their right to strike against the anti-worker French labor law in 2016.

The growing strike wave across Europe is making clear the bankruptcy of the counter-revolutionary, nationalist and pro-capitalist perspective of Syriza and the EL. The militancy of the workers—with a 20 percent wage raise for striking Turkish metalworkers, rail strikes in Britain, and above all the metalworkers strike in Germany, the country that led the EU offensive against Greece—points to the viability of the revolutionary internationalist strategy of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).

The ICFI insisted that only the mobilization of the European working class in struggle in solidarity with the Greek workers against the EU could put an end to austerity. After 25 years of rising imperialist war and austerity since the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union, explosive anger is building up in the European working class. Hostile to the workers and to any appeal to popular opposition across Europe to the EU, Syriza refused to mobilize this sentiment and instead went directly to ill-fated talks with the EU. Predictably, this produced a disaster.

Mélenchon and the PG are intervening to try to prevent Syriza’s record from discrediting the entire ELP and thus to block a political reorientation in the working class, and the unification of European workers struggles on the revolutionary, socialist perspective advanced by the ICFI. The PG fears in particular rising opposition in France to Macron’s agenda: junking the Labor Code to impose sub-

minimum wages, cutting jobs, and ending lifetime employment of public sector workers.

The PG's maneuver is politically dishonest, as the ELP in its broad majority supports the anti-worker line and authoritarian policies of Syriza. Several ELP leaders reacted to the PG statement by issuing statements supporting Syriza and insisting that they would develop their collaboration with Syriza as it seeks to eliminate the right to strike.

Gregor Gysi, president of the EL and former leader of Die Linke—the coalition of Stalinist forces who restored capitalism in East Germany in 1989 and West German social-democratic and petty-bourgeois groups, which voted EU austerity bailouts in the German parliament—defended Syriza. He said, “The Syriza government's policy is largely attributable to the pressure exerted by the troika and the German government. That is the source of the measures including the restrictions on the right to strike, which I am very critical of.”

This is simply cynical posturing to cover up the anti-worker policy of the EL and Die Linke. While claiming to be “very critical” of pseudo-legal measures undermining basic constitutional rights of the working class, Gysi makes clear he will continue to work with Syriza as it applies these measures in Greece. And many forces inside the EL have echoed even more strongly Gysi's support for the anti-worker policies of Syriza.

Anne Sabourin, the Stalinist French Communist Party's European affairs delegate, denounced the PG call to expel Syriza, which she called “ridiculous in form and content. ... We are facing a European Macronism and the rise of the far right, we must unify the forces of radical left that are different, that have different national policies and cultures.”

What is needed, faced with the onslaught of European finance capital, is above all to end the disorienting charade that passes off strike-breaking regimes as the “radical left.” The globalization of capitalism since the 1980s has transformed them into what the ICFI has come to call the pseudo left. The petty-bourgeois layers that ran the increasingly empty shells of the social-democratic, Stalinist or “radical left” bureaucracies—which had entirely lost whatever working class base they earlier had after repeated betrayals—are in fact right-wing, anti-working class forces.

The EL's support for Syriza's anti-strike policy strikingly confirms this fact, and raises the enduring historical relevance of the political work of Leon Trotsky and his Marxist critique of Stalinism and social democracy, continued today by the ICFI alone.

The Stalinists and social democrats applauded the inscribing of many social rights, including the right to strike, in the Italian and French constitutions after World War II, to justify strangling revolutionary struggles in the working

class against the fascist regimes. They then applauded the alignment of the Greek and Spanish constitutions, after the fall of the colonels' junta in 1974 and the Francoite regime in 1978, with these European “norms.”

With this, they were promising that even under capitalism, workers could struggle and defend their social rights. Based on such illusions, many petty-bourgeois tendencies—including the Organisation communiste internationaliste of Pierre Lambert, where Mélenchon began his political career—broke with Trotskyism and the ICFI to accommodate themselves to European capitalism.

History has vindicated the positions of the ICFI, which insisted that their petty-bourgeois, nationalist and counterrevolutionary politics were a dangerous trap for workers. A quarter century after capitalist restoration in the Soviet Union, a possibility against which Trotsky had warned, and in Eastern Europe, basic social and democratic rights are under threat across the continent.

As new struggles are emerging, masses of workers are seeing that these basic social rights are incompatible with capitalism. In Greece, the EU and the ruling class imposed a roughly 40 percent average wage cut while ending universal medical coverage. In France, Macron is ending lifetime employment of public sector workers and pledging to slash pensions and social security. And in Germany, the ruling class is preparing a Grand Coalition government that would work closely with Macron to accelerate the attacks on the working class.

And while the ruling class militarizes society, setting up vast spying laws and surveillance laws aimed at the population across Europe, it also is desperate to roll back, or eliminate outright, the right to prosecute the class struggle. And, while the PG is trying to mask this fact, it enjoys in this policy the support of the EL, whose policy is to hand the workers over bound hand and foot to the banks.

It again confirms that the party that will give revolutionary leadership and socialist perspective to the struggles of the European working class is the ICFI, the only tendency that warned workers about the reactionary role of Syriza before it took power.



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