

A tool of imperialism: Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Unsubmissive France calls for military buildup

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19 February 2018

A class gulf separates the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and its struggle against war from the parties who long dominated what passed for the “left.” These petty-bourgeois forces support militarism and play a major role in suppressing popular opposition to the drive to war. This reality is made clear by the endorsement by Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Unsubmissive France (LFI) movement of Macron's new €300 billion military spending program for 2018-2024.

As Macron threatens to bomb Syria, Germany remilitarizes its foreign policy, and Washington threatens Russia and China, LFI is calling to build up the French war machine. In a press conference at the National Assembly, Mélenchon and two other LFI deputies hailed the French army's demands that French President Emanuel Macron speed up his military spending increases. Their comments lay out the views of sections of the defense industry and ruling elite intent on building a military alliance with Berlin, funded on the backs of the workers.

Endorsing France's ongoing wars in its former colonial empire in Africa, LFI deputy Bastien Lachaud said, “The state of the army is deplorable, because there has been chronic underinvestment in the armed forces under previous presidencies. We lost many soldiers, our weapons have gotten old and are no longer usable... So yes, today we must invest in our weapons.”

At the press conference, not a word was spoken on the consequences of the wars that are being prepared, or on the social impact of a military buildup on the working class. Macron is pledged to strict budgetary austerity and tax cuts for the rich; the billions to fund war are to be taken from social programs and from the workers. But Lachaud only called for increasing military spending faster.

“What we do not like in this military planning law,” he added, “is that it tries to make everyone happy...and so money is not necessarily put where we need it. And I remind you that [chief of the French armed forces] General [Pierre] de Villiers resigned last July in order to make clear that he needed an immediate increase, and so that the spending increases have to start at once, then spending can stabilize later on.”

An army needs soldiers as well as weapons, and LFI deputy Alexis Corbière spoke next to endorse Macron's call to reinstate the draft. Corbière passed through several groups descended from renegades from Trotskyism, including Pierre Lambert's Movement

for a Workers Party (MPPT) and the Pabloite Revolutionary Communist League (the New Anti-capitalist Party, NPA, today). He is also a member of the parliamentary commission planning Macron's reinstatement of the draft.

Addressing Macron's call for all youth to be drafted for 3 to 6 months, he criticized what he called Macron's careless treatment of his parliamentary committee and added vaguely that there are “many contradictions between what will be done and what has been announced.”

Corbière went on to demand a longer mandatory military service period, claiming that this would reconcile the people and the army: “For LFI's part, I recall what was in our program, *A Future in Common*, on which we ran our candidate in the presidential election. We support a mandatory citizens service lasting nine months, which would be the basis of a citizens' National Guard that would allow us to build back up the link between the Army and the Nation.”

These statements are a vindication of the warnings made by the ICFI and its French section, the *Parti de l'égalité socialiste* (PES), about LFI and similar pro-war pseudo-left groups internationally. LFI was built as a trap for millions of people who voted for or participated in LFI's Internet membership drive and public events to support the presidential campaign of Jean-Luc Mélenchon in 2017. They aimed to endorse LFI criticisms of the Socialist Party (PS) government, endless austerity in Europe, and imperialist crimes like Trump's unprovoked bombing of Syria last April.

LFI's criticisms were, however, tactical and fraudulent. LFI officials made such criticisms as petty-bourgeois, pro-imperialist supporters of war and the French army. And so Mélenchon, who denounced Trump's bombing of Syria last year, was silent at the press conference about Macron's threat to bomb Syria last week. Instead, he, Corbière and Lachaud endorsed French militarism as LFI aims to use millions of youth as cannon fodder in future wars.

The exposure of forces like LFI is a critical component of the ICFI's struggle against war. The political machines behind LFI—the faction of the PS that split off to form Mélenchon's Left Party (PG), the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF) and various split-offs from the NPA—are cogs in the war propaganda machine, seeking to lull the population to sleep. The faction around Mélenchon in particular specializes in downplaying the war danger and covering their militarist policies with reactionary populist

attacks on America.

When Mélenchon spoke at the press conference, he tried to distance LFI from Macron by criticizing Macron as a tool of Washington's war drive against Russia and China. He criticized Macron's military budget, declaring, "We open it to page 1 and we find that the latest statement tells us that the true enemies we have on the planet are the Russians and the Chinese. Well, that's not good news, because we do not agree. We think that this has not been proven, that this is only aligned on the gesticulations of the United States of America to maintain their global preeminence."

He added, "There is a rise of tensions, planned and orchestrated by the United States of America and the military coalition it leads, which is NATO, that we have raised alarms about here several times. The logic of the Military Budget Bill and of the thinking of all France's current political leaders follows in the footsteps of Trumpism."

Mélenchon is downplaying the danger of war, even as his organization rushes headlong into arming the French military.

Washington is not "orchestrating" mere "gesticulations." US imperialism is desperately seeking to resolve an objective crisis of world capitalism by threatening, and possibly launching, all-out war, with Trump threatening "fire and fury as the world has never seen" against North Korea on the anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. Twenty-five years of escalating economic rivalry and imperialist wars since the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union have culminated in a political collapse of the post-war capitalist geopolitical order.

The same conflicts between global production and the nation-state system that erupted twice in the 20th century into social revolution and world war are again at explosive levels. Trying to counteract its rivals' growing economic strength with military power, Washington is threatening Russia, Iran, North Korea and China—wars that would entail mass casualties and, all but inevitably, the use of nuclear weapons. Or, as Britain's *Economist* wrote last month, "Conflict on a scale and intensity not seen since the second world war is once again plausible. The world is not prepared."

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The central task posed to workers and youth is to alert the working class to the imminence of the war danger and to unite workers—in America, in Europe, and internationally—in struggle against it. The question that must be posed to Macron and other NATO heads of state is: what are the consequences of the wars they are preparing? If, as President François Hollande said in 2015, "total war" with Russia is now a danger, how many nuclear bombs may go off over major cities in Europe and internationally, and how many people could lose their lives?

Instead, Mélenchon attacks Macron, claiming that he is aligned with Trump. In fact, it is not so much Macron who is aligned on Trump, but Mélenchon who is aligned on Macron. Macron has, of course, echoed US criticisms of Russia and China in his budget bill, and there is a real danger that France may, as part of NATO, attack Russia and China. But Mélenchon speaks very directly for other, powerful sections of the ruling class in France, including in the Macron administration, who are looking for a different policy.

Mélenchon's demands for closer ties to Moscow and Beijing and for an independent foreign policy echo Macron's calls for closer commercial and strategic ties with Russia, his cordial trip to China last month, and his attempt to build an independent EU military around a Berlin-Paris axis. This has led to worried remarks by NATO and US officials that the EU military plan could "splinter" the military alliance between America and Europe.

Or, as Corbière put it, "We want to leave NATO, now more than ever. Because we do not share the interests of the United States. And it is the United States that dominates that military alliance. They have, as you know, a \$600 billion budget for military spending, 700 military bases around the world, and in reality the military-industrial complex controls the American economy."

These are, however, simply jealous criticisms made from the standpoint of a rival imperialist power. All the organizations inside LFI rejected Marxism and the working class many decades ago, sealing alliances with the Socialist Party (PS), a big-business party founded after the 1968 general strike. Over the decades, they adapted their Stalinist or petty-bourgeois rhetoric ever more directly to their close ties with the army, the banks, and the super-rich—including, in the case of LFI, Mélenchon's friendship with defense contractor and aerospace multibillionaire Serge Dassault.

And so, at the same press conference where Corbière denounced the US military-industrial complex and its vast financial resources, Lachaud included a shameless plug for the French army to buy Dassault's Rafale fighter jet, which he insisted is "better than the Eurofighter."

There is deep opposition to war among workers across Europe and the world, and particularly in the United States. In France, opposition is rising rapidly among workers to the attacks on basic social rights through which Macron plans to fund his military buildup. This social force is the material basis of the ICFI's struggle to build an antiwar, anti-capitalist and socialist movement in the international working class. An essential political prerequisite of such a movement is a struggle against the nationalist and petty-bourgeois outlook promoted by LFI.



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