

Melenchon keeps silent on Syria strikes at Marseille protest

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On Saturday, April 14, an “anti-Macron” demonstration took place in Marseille, called by the Stalinist General Confederation of Labor (CGT) and a dozen political parties and unions, including the Solidarity union, and the National Union of Students of France (UNEF). The protest underscored the gulf separating, on the one hand, the determination of workers and youth to fight against Macron and the growing danger of war, and on the other, the politics of the trade unions and parties which controlled the demonstration.

According to the CGT, 58,000 people attended the protest; railway workers were at its head. Retirees, students, postal workers, dock workers and public-sector employees turned out to say “no” to a “social coup d’état” by Macron.

Banners at the rally included calls for an “unlimited general strike” as well as references to the French, British and US bombing of Syria against the Assad regime. One could also hear the slogan, “It is not the demonstrators who must be expelled, but the Macron government that must be removed.” This was a reference to the violent expulsion of 100 demonstrators in Notre Dame des Landes by French security forces.

There is immense anger toward French President Emmanuel Macron’s policies of war and austerity and his contempt for the opposition of workers and youth. On TF1 television, he had declared: “But opinion is not an objective in and of itself. Excuse me for being direct, but what is opinion? Does it mean that every day we would have to read surveys on one or another issue, and say we should do this or that?”

But remarkably, at the conclusion of the April 14 rally, there were no speeches by the politicians present at the “anti-Macron” protest. Just a few hours after the aggressive strikes by Washington, London and Paris

against Syria, the political forces leading the protest did not want to make any appeal to the mass opposition to this war crime.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the deputy of Marseille who was the politician figure at the event, had published an open letter to the leaders of multiple parties, as well as Benoît Hamon, the former candidate of the Socialist Party for the presidential elections, inviting them to attend the demonstration. Philippe Poutou of the New Anticapitalist Party was also present alongside Mélenchon.

Mélenchon hailed the unions and called on all organizations who wished to join the movement to do so. “I hope that this can take place in every country,” he said. “It is a great break in the wall separating the social movement and political action.”

Le Monde wrote: “Symbolically, the deputy [Mélenchon] walked at the head of the march until the top of La Canebière [a major street in Marseille], behind a banner which declared, ‘Government-Medef [the national employers association] want to kill us, let’s stop them.’ Then he allowed himself to slide back into his troops, many thousands of activists who marched in groups of their town and region.”

Questioned about the demonstration, Poutou, the candidate of the NPA in the last presidential election, said vaguely: “What is taking place here in Marseille is a great rupture between the social movement and political action. Clearly, in this country, there is a wish to send a message to Macron to stop.”

In every great revolutionary crisis, the mass of workers passes through different experiences and political stages, as it becomes more conscious of the political situation and the tasks that confront it. The task of a genuine revolutionary leadership—which Mélenchon and his party certainly are not—is to explain

the objective role of these political tendencies and thus to prepare a political reorientation of masses of workers as they increasingly come into struggle.

Mélenchon, the NPA, and the union bureaucracies tied to them, offer no way forward for workers and youth fighting austerity. Fifty years after the May 1968 general strike, these forces, which emerged from the petty-bourgeois and anti-Marxist student movement of that period, have placed themselves under the banner of “humanitarian” war, through which Paris is advancing its imperialist interests.

The current protests take place under conditions of a revolutionary crisis that is far more advanced than a half century ago. The class-collaborationist politics which underlay the Grenelle accords and the Stalinists’ betrayal of the general strike lie in tatters. Around the world, the ruling class is preparing for war. Macron is seeking to restructure class relations along authoritarian lines in order to finance tax cuts for the rich and €300 billion for the military from now to 2024.

In contrast to May ’68, the Macron government will not make any concessions to the workers due to the economic crisis, which provides him with no room to manoeuvre, and the growing NATO drive to war with Russia, which underlies France’s intervention in Syria. For the ruling class to pursue these policies, it must build a police state, through state of emergency laws and the censorship of the Internet, in order to suppress popular opposition.

The merging of the movement of youth in the growing revolutionary movement of the working class cannot take place under the leadership of Mélenchon, the NPA and the trade unions. These pro-war and populist pseudo-left forces have no viable political perspective to offer.

The unions have collaborated in the formulation of not only the labor laws and Macron’s anti-worker decrees, but also the preparations for war, having explicitly endorsed the war in Syria in a 2012 statement. Mélenchon and the NPA both applauded the NATO war in Libya and the beginning of the war in Syria. And they remained silent on Saturday about the criminal character of the imperialist powers’ latest bombing of Syria.

Mélenchon offered to serve as Macron’s prime minister on multiple occasions. But the policies of a Macron-Mélenchon government would not

fundamentally differ from those being carried out at present by Macron and Edouard Philippe. The perspective of building such a bourgeois government—a perspective which in fact is entirely opposed to the seizure of power by the working class, as in October 1917 in Russia—is a trap.

The fundamental task facing workers and youth in 2018 is that raised by the Socialist Equality Party: the construction of a Marxist leadership in opposition to the reactionary politics of the petty-bourgeois pseudo-left.



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