

Appeal to neo-fascists on police scandal exposes reactionary role of Unsubmissive France

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The implosion of the French National Assembly's commission of inquiry on the police scandal involving top presidential aide Alexandre Benalla has exposed the anti-worker politics of Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Unsubmissive France (LFI) party. LFI, a populist pseudo-left group linked to Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain, formed a tactical alliance with the right-wing The Republicans (LR) party and the neo-fascist National Rally (RN, formerly the National Front) based on common support for the police apparatus' complaints against Benalla.

Ultimately, representatives of the Republic on the March (LRM) party of President Emmanuel Macron brought down the work of the commission last Friday. At that point, LFI's Danièle Obono spoke in front of the cameras to attack LRM commission president Yaël Braun-Pivet. Then she invited other opposition figures, including RN leader Marine Le Pen, to do the same. Le Pen spoke first after Obono's invitation.

Obono's defence on Twitter, claiming that she had addressed her remarks to LR rather than to Le Pen, changes nothing essential. Not only was it Le Pen who accepted Obono's invitation to speak, but it confirms that LFI's perspective in the crisis unleashed by the Benalla Affair is to cut deals with right-wing, pro-police forces.

This underscores the warnings made by the *Parti de l'égalité socialiste* (PES), the French section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, on the repressive and anti-democratic character of Mélenchon's politics. Like other pseudo-left groups, such as the New Anti-capitalist Party, Mélenchon and his party refused to give any clear leadership in the second round of last year's presidential elections, when

millions of Mélenchon's voters refused to vote for either Macron or Le Pen. The PES was the only party to call for an active boycott and fight for the building of a political movement in the working class against whichever right-wing candidate won the election.

If some were surprised at Obono's behaviour, given her Gabonese origins, the PES was not. Her appeal directed to Le Pen, the main political representative not only of neo-fascism but of the security forces, was a clear sign. After Syriza and its electoral alliance with the right-wing Independent Greeks, and the populist Five-Star Movement's alliance with the fascistic Lega of Matteo Salvini in Italy, it is emerging that LFI's populism is compatible with right-wing, anti-worker policies rejected by millions of LFI voters. This vindicates the PES' record and its struggle to build a Trotskyist vanguard in France.

The Benalla affair unmasked the arbitrary, violent and illegal character of the French ruling class and political establishment. A video showing Benalla assaulting two young protesters on May Day exposed the arbitrary powers given to police since France imposed a state of emergency. A police state is rapidly taking shape in France and across Europe, as the European Union (EU) decrees the construction of a vast network of concentration camps for refugees across the continent targeting refugees first of all, but ultimately directed at all internal opposition.

In this situation, what brings together Mélenchon, the right and the extreme right is the promotion of the police and of state repression. As the ruling elite bickers over the best methods of imposing a dictatorship, it summons together various political tendencies to cover up or downplay the significance of

police brutality, which is at the center of the emerging police state regime in France.

Whether or not it was intentional, Obono's invitation to Le Pen to speak was not an accident. It was the inevitable outcome of the political convergence between Mélenchon, LR and FN over the preceding days.

Mélenchon made no bones about his delight in allying with right-wing forces. "When it is a question of protecting the state and to ensure the respect of the norms of our Republic, we are allied with the right and I am proud of it," he said. Last week, he carried out intensive discussions with LR parliamentary group chief Christian Jacob and with Nicolas Dupont-Aignan, the head of a small far-right nationalist party, Arise France, that allied with Le Pen during the 2017 presidential run-off, on motions of censure targeting the Macron government.

The reactionary and cynical opportunism of LFI's appeals to LR and even the neo-fascists is only surpassed by the hypocrisy of LRM, which objects now to links between LFI and the neo-fascists even though it was Macron who addressed a "Republican salute" to Le Pen on the night of his election.

More fundamentally, the spat between Mélenchon and Macron over the Benalla affair shows what the entire French political establishment, including its pseudo-left components, agrees upon. Mélenchon attacks Macron, claiming his approach is "amateurism" and reproaching Macron, in effect, for trying to build a police state without the full and unqualified support of the police forces and the old political parties. With this platform, he is getting support from the police and the army, which have a significant presence inside LFI, and from Le Pen.

LFI's support for the bourgeoisie's preparation of a police state is that of an affluent middle class, obsessed with identity politics and hostile to the working class and the class struggle. This social layer is built around demoralized post-1968 student radicals who have passed through various petty-bourgeois Pabloite parties that postured for a time as the "far left" and occasionally claimed to be "Trotskyist" in order to cover up their right-wing policies. Obono is a typical representative of this layer.

Obono was initially a member of Socialism From Below (SPEB), an organization affiliated to Britain's

Socialist Workers Party (SWP), a petty-bourgeois tendency that denounced the Soviet Union as "state capitalist." In 2004, together with SPEB, she entered into the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR), France's main Pabloite organization, and then into the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) into which the LCR dissolved itself in 2009 under the direction of Alain Krivine and Olivier Besancenot.

She joined the Convergence and Alternative (C&A) tendency of the NPA, which left the NPA in 2011 and joined the United Left group of ex-LCR leader Christian Picquet, who together with the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF) had joined Mélenchon's Left Front coalition already in 2009.

These corrupt links underscore that, in order to fight the rising police state and the deep social austerity measures imposed by Macron, the working class needs a new party, the PES, fighting for a socialist program on which to unify the international working class, and based on which the working class can take power.

Events have confirmed the PES's call for an active boycott of the second round of the presidential election and its warning that Macron was not a lesser evil to Le Pen. Nor was the boycott call a manoeuvre to get voters to vote Mélenchon in upcoming elections. It sought to make clear that the only viable perspective was a politically independent, revolutionary movement of the working class in opposition to the pseudo-left. The role of the pseudo-left, and particularly the recent comments of Mélenchon and Obono, have yet again confirmed this analysis.



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