

# France's Mélenchon tacitly backs Wagenknecht's xenophobic Aufstehen group

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13 October 2018

Jean-Luc Mélenchon kept silent for weeks after the official in his Unsubmissive France (LFI) party tasked with geopolitical issues, Djordje Kuzmanovic, made a statement calling for the defense of French workers against foreigners. Kuzmanovic had hailed the xenophobic Aufstehen (Rise Up) movement launched by Mélenchon's German ally, Sahra Wagenknecht. By his silence, Mélenchon is tacitly supporting forces within LFI orienting toward Wagenknecht's right-wing populism.

Reacting in early September in *L'Obs* to the formation of Aufstehen, which promotes hostility toward refugees on the grounds that they are stealing native-born workers' jobs and supports European remilitarization, the former paratrooper Kuzmanovic called for hustling votes by promoting a chauvinist program.

He declared, "Certain left-wing voters are shifting toward right-wing populism, but the main problem is that a large part of the lower classes are abstaining. If there is an electorate that we should be winning over, it's that one! The danger is that if we do not manage it, we will be in a situation like Italy, where the progressive forces are blown apart and the xenophobic right is in power. Sahra Wagenknecht's line on the immigrant question therefore seems to me a question of public cleanliness."

Having thus echoed the praise of the German far right for Wagenknecht's party, Kuzmanovic demanded that the security forces "rapidly" deport all refugees whose right to asylum is denied, claiming this to be a "Marxist" policy.

Kuzmanovic's interview created some disquiet within LFI. A few days after it appeared in *L'Obs*, Mélenchon asked the magazine to remove its reference to the fact that Kuzmanovic is an "adviser" to him. He

also asked *L'Obs* to add a note that he had drafted to the text of the article, stating: "The point of view he expresses on immigration is strictly personal. He is starting debates that are not my own."

Mélenchon's attempt to distance himself from Kuzmanovic is politically dishonest, as LFI has no fundamental divergences with Kuzmanovic or Aufstehen. He is trying only to prevent the xenophobic positions of LFI's central leadership from discrediting his movement in the eyes of voters.

Those who voted for Mélenchon in the last presidential election did so overwhelmingly to express opposition to Trump's air strikes in Syria as well as hostility to austerity and horror over refugee drownings in the Mediterranean, not to support nationalism or neo-fascism.

However, LFI's statements testify to the broad support Kuzmanovic's xenophobic positions have within the LFI leadership. Alexis Corbière, an LFI deputy and spokesman who is Mélenchon's top assistant, came out in defense of Kuzmanovic, saying, "Djordje is a friend, precious and intelligent, who does not deserve the crude caricature being made of him."

*Inrockuptibles* magazine cited a "historic member" of LFI, who explained that Kuzmanovic was protecting Mélenchon by floating a trial balloon. He said, "As I read the interview, I don't see that Djordje diverges from what Jean-Luc said in his speech in Marseille." He added, "This looks more and more like a tactical and not a fundamental difference. Kuzmanovic is serving as cover on the immigration issue. No one would have dared criticize Jean-Luc directly."

Kuzmanovic himself spoke about his *L'Obs* interview, saying that he regretted "having added 'Yes and rapidly' when speaking about people who should be deported due to their ineligibility for the right to

asylum.” He added, “Journalists can look at what Jean-Luc Mélenchon has said on these questions and compare it to what I replied... If it is different, then I did not hear the music right.”

In fact, four days after the *L’Obs* article appeared, Mélenchon backed Wagenknecht’s initiative, publishing a Facebook post calling on his followers to “understand the text” of a *Libération* article citing Wagenknecht as saying, “More immigration means more and more competition for jobs... and, of course, a greater burden on social infrastructure.”

Mélenchon’s tacit support for the xenophobic policy of Kuzmanovic and Wagenknecht exposes LFI’s essential hostility to Marxism and the working class, which they seek to divide along national lines. As social anger grows against Macron and his attempts to demolish workers’ basic social rights, the LFI leadership is trying to block a movement to the left in the working class.

It prefers to spread among the workers a xenophobic line compatible with far-right politics, and even invite the right-wing The Republicans (LR) party to LFI’s summer school to discuss military issues.

This confirms the Marxist critique formulated by the *World Socialist Web Site* over the last decade of Mélenchon’s populist and anti-Trotskyist politics.

As the WSWS wrote on Kuzmanovic’s interview:

The more recent founding of Syriza, Die Linke, Podemos, LFI and now Aufstehen ultimately provided only a facelift for nationalist, petty-bourgeois forces coming from Stalinism or Pabloism—like Mélenchon, who began his political career in the Organisation communiste internationaliste (OCI) of Pierre Lambert. The OCI had broken with the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and with Trotskyism in 1971. Mélenchon joined the PS (Socialist Party) in 1976 and worked closely with PS President François Mitterrand.

LFI’s shift toward an openly xenophobic line points to Mélenchon’s strategy and the nature of his break with the PS. After the PS suffered electoral defeats in 2002 and 2007 due to workers’ hostility to the PS governments of Mitterrand and Jospin, Mélenchon tried to rebrand Jospin’s Plural Left alliance with Stalinist, Green and Pabloite forces, launching the Left Party (PG) with a section of the PS in 2009 and then forming the Left Front. There, he worked with similar Stalinist,

Pabloite and “eco-socialist” elements to try to win voters who were to the left of the PS.

As the PS disintegrated during the 2012-2017 PS presidency of François Hollande, Mélenchon in 2014 announced the death of socialism and the left. The anti-Marxist populist positions he then took, on the pretext of updating methods of popular struggle for the 21st century, were signals launched in the direction of the far right.

A decade after the eruption of the global capitalist crisis in 2008, growing social inequality, the buildup toward world war, and the police state policies being adopted by capitalist governments throughout the world are driving an international radicalization of the working class. In this context, Mélenchon and the forces in the affluent middle class that he represents are moving rapidly to the right, in line with the evolution of the entire European political establishment.

Wagenknecht has been in discussions with the neo-fascist Alternative for Germany (AfD), as factions of Spain’s Podemos party are applauding Italy’s neo-fascist Interior Minister Matteo Salvini, while remaining silent on the deportation of migrants. All take as a model the policies in Greece of Syriza, which, as the leading force in a coalition government with the far-right Independent Greeks (Anel) party, is implementing savage austerity and jailing immigrants in concentration camps.



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