

After police raids on LFI, French courts and media denounce Mélenchon

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After the police raids targeting the Unsubmissive France (LFI) movement on the order of the Paris prosecutor, the courts and the media are launching a violent campaign targeting LFI leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon. They are manifestly threatening to ban LFI, an organization that received the votes of 20 percent of the electorate in last year's presidential elections, or at least to threaten its leaders with substantial legal penalties.

This would mark a major step in the transformation of the police state created in France during 2015–2017 into a tool serving openly to crush political opposition and social anger against the financial aristocracy. Indeed, the manner in which official circles are treating the police raids is a warning as to the profound crisis of French democracy. A police state exists and is rapidly consolidating itself—a situation that poses mortal dangers to the working class.

The state and the media are concentrating on the fact that Mélenchon got angry at police who were searching LFI headquarters and were illegally trying to prevent LFI parliamentarians from entering their party headquarters. The LFI officials had to break down a door guarded by police in order to enter into their offices, and Mélenchon had harsh words for police inside LFI headquarters. Many videos of the confrontation are circulating online.

In one of them, Mélenchon said: “You are not acting as policemen in a democratic state. ... You cannot bother us, you cannot push us, you have no right to prevent us from entering into our headquarters, above all because we are not obstructing your searches. But you are acting in a very strange way. You enter, you take all sorts of things, you do not say what they are, you leave and we do not know what you have taken.”

In fact, beyond the personal effects of LFI leaders,

police gathered all the data on computers at LFI headquarters. Manuel Bompard, the LFI campaign coordinator, denounced the behavior of the police and of investigators: “I was prevented from attending and observing the administrative procedure, although I am the legal representative of Unsubmissive France, but I was not allowed to attend the operations. ... I received no legal document to sign.”

“A policeman grabbed me by the neck, by the arm, pulled me. This policeman's hierarchy came to him and said: ‘calm down.’ I was roughed up, attacked ... What took place is unacceptable,” he added, insisting that he would “launch a lawsuit at the police station for the blows I received.”

Nonetheless, the state and the media, far from critiquing police behavior, rapidly aligned themselves with the police to attack Mélenchon. Yesterday, the courts announced they would launch an investigation into Mélenchon's behavior during the police raids. The Paris prosecutor's office, which first launched the raids, opened an inquiry into charges of “threats or acts of intimidation against the judiciary” and “violence targeting persons who represent the public authority.”

Several police trade unions, close to the far right, demanded a “public apology” from Mélenchon, including the Workers Force (FO) police union. The Alliance union, historically linked to the neo-fascist National Front, called on the new interior minister, Christophe Castaner, to file a complaint targeting the LFI leader.

In order to maintain at least the false semblance of impartiality despite having launched the trial, Paris prosecutor François Molins then asked the general prosecutor to be allowed to recuse himself from the case, so that the nearest regional court would take charge of it.

The principal French media are launching a wave of denunciations of Mélenchon. This points, above all, to the unlimited deference to the police that predominates in official publications, which are all in agreement on threatening Mélenchon. *Libération*, *Le Monde*, *L'Obs* all published articles hostile to LFI yesterday.

Libération was the most aggressive against LFI, publishing reactionary articles suggesting that Mélenchon's behavior could justify banning LFI. The daily put on its front page a large picture of Mélenchon with the headline "Is this one step too far?" In its article titled "Police raid on Mélenchon: from unsubmissiveness to obstruction," it accuses Mélenchon, without any proof of his having tried to block the police searches. *Libération* threatens: "The leader of Unsubmissive France is posturing as a political martyr, risking illegality."

Having made this extraordinary threat, *Libération* then attacks the LFI parliamentarians, giving a free pass to the police: "It's not nothing, in France, to see elected officials physically oppose policemen who are carrying out a judicial order."

In its editorial titled "Tactics," *Libération* poses as being understanding, admitting that it's "not surprising" that LFI "is screaming against such a massive police operation. ... But if you step back a bit, you have to say that the reaction of the leaders of Unsubmissive France is essentially outrageous and illegitimate." Declaring that "the judges were only doing their job" in ordering the raid, *Libération* concludes: "where they went over the red line, it was when deputies of the nation blocked, with numbers and with decibels, a perfectly legitimate judicial inquiry."

In fact, there is no reason to believe that the judges were only doing their work, or that the judicial inquiry that provided a pretext for the police raids was "perfectly legitimate." It was recently reported that Prime Minister Edouard Philippe had "auditioned" all the candidates for the position of Paris prosecutor. The journal *Les Echos* reported that this was an "unprecedented situation" and pointed to these "meetings that Edouard Philippe 'took credit for,' because he wants 'to be certain' that he will be 'perfectly happy' with the future prosecutor."

That is, the prosecutor was carefully selected by the government, which was no doubt forewarned on Tuesday about such a large-scale, impending police

sweep on Mélenchon—with 15 police raids carried out by over 100 policemen—before it happened. The attack on Mélenchon and LFI is manifestly political, carried out by the executive even as it is at its lowest point ever in the polls and is desperately trying to strangle all social opposition to its program.

This underscores yet again the bankruptcy of the political orientation proposed by Mélenchon: its nationalism, his and his party's ties to the army and intelligence services, and his call to integrate right-wing forces into the LFI, most recently at the party's recent summer school. It is important to note the remarkable fact that, despite the ties he has cultivated inside the state machine, Mélenchon seems to have been genuinely surprised by the raids Tuesday morning. The various police and intelligence officials he recruited to LFI could not or did not warn him that they were impending.



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