Leading Mélenchon supporter backs Le Pen's neo-fascist National Rally

Alex Lantier
24 May 2019

Last week, Andréa Kotarac, a young leader of Jean-luc Mélenchon's Unsubmissive France (LFI) party, announced his resignation from LFI and his support for Marine Le Pen's neo-fascist movement against his former party. The media have widely covered his reactionary positions.

"Being born in 1989, I must admit to you that I am pretty unconcerned about the taboos posed by the left of the 1980s," he declared to the far-right magazine *Elements*. "The European elections are a unique chance to make a choice: either comfort Macron and his policy of social cuts that is bringing about a federal Europe; or vote usefully for the only list capable of beating him on the night of May 26. Therefore, my choice is made: I will vote for the list headed by Jordan Bardella and Marine Le Pen."

On BFM-TV, Kotarac declared, "Macron has catalyzed the anger of the French … He has responded to it with arrogance and insults." Kotarac therefore appealed for a neo-fascist vote to "block" Macron. Kotarac saluted Marine Le Pen and declared that he felt "fairly in phase with her social side and her attachment to the indivisible character of the French nation."

In response, Mélenchon declared that Kotarac's actions were a betrayal, a "dirty trick" and an "end-of-campaign stink-bomb."

This explanation is too easy by half, or more. In fact, Kotarac's alignment with the neo-fascists required no fundamental change in the nationalist conceptions that he held inside LFI and which were widely known. Based on Mélenchon's nationalism, he developed a profound hostility to immigrant workers. Thus, he declared: "On immigration, Jean-Luc Mélenchon has a good analysis, he has said that immigration is a sufferance … Since it's a sufferance, it must be stopped." He added: "I prefer for people to live with dignity and pride, in their own country."

Kotarac came to public attention by attending a conference organized by the Kremlin in Crimea, where he spoke alongside two French neo-fascists, Thierry Mariani and Marion Maréchal Le Pen. The latter openly attends the meetings of *Action Française*, the anti-Semitic and Vichyite movement of Charles Maurras in the 20th century.

Kotarac's evolution from the LFI to the neo-fascists is neither a coincidence, nor an individual incident. It corresponds to a profound class logic.

Faced with a resurgence of working-class struggles developing against the union bureaucracies, the nationalist petty-bourgeois in the "left" populist movement are shifting sharply to the right. Terrified by the eruption of strikes and protests, including in Portugal, the Polish teachers strike, the French "yellow vest" protests and the struggles of Algerian workers and youth against the military regime, they are seeking a strong leader to unify the nation—and smother and repress working-class opposition.

The electoral calculations which pushed Kotarac into the arms of the extreme right reflect the political bankruptcy of LFI. Since the eruption of the "yellow vest" movement, Mélenchon's party has collapsed. It received seven million votes—or 20 percent of the total—in the 2017 presidential elections and was proclaimed the "greatest rival to Macron" just after the election. The party's evolution—and that of Kotarac—confirm the warnings made by the Socialist Equality Party (PES) as to the reactionary role of Mélenchon's populist nationalism.

LFI did not organize a single mass protest to support the "yellow vests" or oppose acts of police violence against them, but instead aligned with the unions, who strangled strikes of truckers and port workers and publicly slandered the "yellow vests" as neo-fascists. Now, amid growing panic in ruling circles, LFI is discredited among workers by its inaction and has sunk to barely 8 percent in European election polls.

Facing an electoral debacle, LFI is split between a "populist" faction orienting more to the neo-fascists, and a faction around Mélenchon, who is trying to re-construct a "popular federation" alliance with the big business Socialist Party (PS), from which Macron emerged.

This evolution underscores the class gulf separating the PES from LFI. The PES stressed that the "yellow vest" movement was part of an international resurgence of working class struggles that refutes bourgeois propaganda that the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union marked the "End of History" and the final triumph of capitalism. All the major strikes and protests worldwide have culminated in bitter confrontations with the ruling elite, for which the only progressive outcome is the taking of power by the working class.

LFI's right wing trajectory reflects above all the rejection of Trotskyism by its founder, Mélenchon. He first joined Pierre Lambert's Internationalist Communist Organization (OCI), who was breaking with the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) to support the so-called "Union of the Left" between the PS and the Stalinist French Communist Party. OCI members worked simultaneously in the PS, including future pro-austerity Prime Minister Lionel Jospin and Mélenchon, who was a PS advisor, senator or minister from 1976 to 2008.

© World Socialist Web Site

The superficiality of Mélenchon's break with the PS to found the Left Front in 2009 is now exposed by his calls for a renewed alliance with it. He carried out this maneuver together with former social democrat Oskar Lafontaine of the German Left Party—a coalition between the Stalinists who restored capitalism in East Germany, and social-democratic or petty-bourgeois tendencies from West Germany. At the same time, he allied with Greece's Syriza party, which is currently in power and imposing billions of euros in social cuts against workers in Greece.

Kotarac's evolution is yet another warning on the counter-revolutionary role of these parties, whose conscious petty-bourgeois orientation is reflected in their explicit rejection of Marxism. Faced with the "yellow vests," Mélenchon stressed his populism, inspired by Chantal Mouffe's theories. While insisting that "an institutional resolution to events" was essential, he denounced on his blog "the traditional dogma of the traditional left and far left," that is, "the centrality of the concept of proletariat and socialist revolution as the inevitable pairing in the dynamic of History."

Decades after Mélenchon drew the political conclusions that flowed from the OCI's liquidationist orientation and directly joined the PS, Kotarac is now drawing the conclusions of Mélenchon's nationalist populism and passing from LFI to neo-fascism. This underscores the importance of the ICFI's struggle to found its French section, the PES, as the political alternative for the working class to the right-wing evolution of the entire pseudo-left milieu that emerged from the petty-bourgeois post-1968 student movement.

The two electoral strategies emerging inside LFI—alliances with either the far right or the PS—are both reactionary and unpopular. Kotarac's statement hailing the "social side" of the political heir of the fascist Vichy regime and her alleged capacity to unify France is obscene. Were she to be in power, Le Pen would carry out a policy of violent austerity, militarism and police repression, as her Italian ally, Interior Minister Matteo Salvini, has already done.

But no fundamental difference separates the LFI factions orienting towards the far right from those more orienting to the PS, around Mélenchon. The PS, who imposed the labor law and the state of emergency, thereby launched the policy of violent austerity and military-police repression of Macron, who also hailed France's fascist dictator, Philippe Pétain. And Mélenchon, by highlighting his anti-Marxist populism, helped hatch the forces now turning against him.

After leaving the PS in 2008, he made many friendships with right-wing nationalist or far-right politicians, like Henri Guaino or the pro-Pétainist journalist Eric Zemmour. He also recruited to LFI a broad layer of "populists" drawn from the police and army brass. Mélenchon's former foreign policy advisor, the Serbian former intelligence official Djordje Kuzmanovic, was only a particular striking example of this phenomenon.

The far right, which has deep roots in police, intelligence agencies and the officer corps, constantly rubs shoulders with LFI members in these circles and carries out its propaganda among them. *Elements* magazine's account of how its interview with Kotarac came about and how he joined the far right gives a revealing glimpse of these ties the far right is developing with pseudo-left forces like LFI:

> We started our quest, calling the left, the right, finally Unsubmissive France, those who had slammed the door and left, those who were disappointed, and everyone else. … The resignation of Andréa Kotarac, like the expulsion of representatives of a nationalist line inside Unsubmissive France like François Cocq or Djordje Kuzmanovic, were prepared. There will undoubtedly be more. And we will welcome them in the pages of *Elements*, as we did for Denis Collin, who is around Djordje Kuzmanovic's Sovereign Republic party; Jacques Nikonoff, the former president of the Attac anti-globalization movement; or *Politis* magazine founder Bernard Langlois.

This layer's move to the far right is the final outcome of the long, reactionary evolution of the nationalist and anti-Trotskyist petty bourgeois, including Mélenchon himself. Indeed, *Elements* could have added that the far-right magazine *Krisis* welcomed Mélenchon for an interview in 1992, when he was an adviser to PS President and former Vichy official François Mitterrand.

The media have endlessly repeated that Kotarac's announcement confirms that the far left is in fact close to the far right, like the two extremities of a horseshoe. An anti-communist trope of the Cold War era, this "horseshoe theory" is fundamentally flawed. It excuses Macron, who is supposedly in the "center" of the ruling establishment but who has hailed Pétain and carried out an authoritarian policy with imperialist wars in Africa and the violent repression of the "yellow vests." It is not that the "extremes" are moving closer together, but that the entire political establishment is moving violently to the right, against the working class.

The political alternative to the hysterical nationalist evolution of the social layers around LFI is the ICFI's struggle to defend the continuity of Trotskyism, and to re-establish it in France by building the PES.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site