

French police launch protests outside Jean-Luc Mélenchon's headquarters

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In an unprecedented decision, the neo-fascist Alliance Police trade union is holding protests today outside the headquarters of Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Unsubmissive France (LFI) party. Dispensing with the official state tradition that they are an apolitical body with a "duty to be reserved," police are targeting the presidential candidate who led in working class areas of major French cities in the 2017 elections. These protests, backed by President Emmanuel Macron's government, mark a dangerous new stage in the emergence of a police state in France.

The immediate pretext of the protest is Mélenchon's criticism of police as "barbaric" during protests Tuesday against President Emmanuel Macron's pension cuts. Mélenchon, who is in the courts facing charges of rebellion and assaulting state officials as he contested last year's police raid on LFI headquarters, warned protesters to be careful. He said, "They are barbaric, they don't hold back anymore! If I had been at the ['yellow vest'] demonstration Saturday, they would have killed me, you know, they are waiting for a pretext."

The sentiment expressed by Mélenchon about the police is widely shared. In France, police have violently assaulted "yellow vest" protesters, arresting thousands and wounding thousands more with stun grenades and rubber bullets, and killed Steve Maia Caniço by pushing him into the Loire River in Nantes during a late-night music concert. Millions have been shocked and outraged at the actions of police. The expression of this view by a prominent politician immediately triggered a hysterical response in the state, however, which is terrified of rising social anger and class struggle.

Interior Minister Christophe Castaner effectively gave a green light to the Alliance Police protest against

Mélenchon on Twitter. He replied that Mélenchon's remarks were "An unacceptable insult to our security forces that are mobilized, day in day out, to protect the French people, risking their very lives. Jean-Luc Mélenchon owes them respect, and now he owes them an apology."

The WSWs and the Parti de l'égalité socialiste (PES) have extensively documented their principled political differences with Mélenchon and the French nationalist politics of the LFI, the French affiliate of Greece's pro-austerity Syriza ("Coalition of the Radical Left") party. However, Mélenchon must be defended against the hysterical attack launched against him by the Macron government and the police apparatus.

What is at stake is the freedom not only of Mélenchon, but of the entire working class to express its opposition to police crackdowns, and more broadly to social inequality and military-police rule.

After Castaner's attack on Mélenchon via Twitter, the entire machinery of France's police trade union bureaucracy was set into motion to target Mélenchon. The Workers Force (FO) police union called his comments "inadmissible" and demanded Macron launch "a lawsuit for incitement to hatred against this character," while the National Union of Autonomous Unions (UNSA) police union denounced Mélenchon as "shocking" and "humiliating."

This propaganda is the final product of a longer campaign against Mélenchon, who is awaiting sentencing in his trial for shoving judicial officers during the police search of LFI headquarters last year. The fact that the search of LFI was illegal, since police tried to keep LFI staff from monitoring what information was being taken away from their headquarters during the search, was ignored. However, when Mélenchon got angry and pushed the officers, he

found himself facing rebellion charges carrying up to a 10-year prison sentence.

This is part of an international tendency across Europe in which fascistic police forces behave violently and aggressively, trampling basic democratic rights with the complicity of unpopular European governments. In France, the repression of the “yellow vests” and the targeting of Mélenchon testify to the extraordinary concentration of power in the hands of police. Even as they spy on and brutally assault the population, a legal framework is emerging in which any attempt at self-defense against police carries with it the danger of massive legal penalties.

Similar policies are emerging across Europe, including Spain—where the *Guardia Civil* brutally cracked down on peaceful protesters during the October 1, 2017, Catalan independence referendum and are preparing a renewed crackdown on Catalan protests—and also Germany. There, the entire state machine is protecting various networks of far-right operatives in the security forces, including one that drew up a kill list of several hundred politicians.

Initially yesterday, Mélenchon had launched an appeal on Twitter for LFI supporters to come out to protect LFI staff and headquarters against any eventual assault launched by pro-fascist police units: “Tomorrow a police union is calling protests against LFI headquarters at 11 a.m. Illegal protest. I request the protection of the *gendarmérie*. I believe the protection of witnesses drawn from the people would be decisive.”

In the face of the campaign against him, however, he decided yesterday afternoon to leave LFI headquarters deserted today as the Alliance Police union officials and members march by. On his Facebook account yesterday evening, Mélenchon shifted his position, warning his supporters against holding any counterdemonstration.

Mélenchon wrote that police “would immediately seize on it to justify committing acts of violence. So the decision of the comrades is to leave our headquarters empty. It’s to say ‘we’re not there,’ and I formally ask you: please avoid going through this area. They will try to provoke you and create impossible situations.”

The necessity of pulling back faced with threats of fascist police violence endorsed by Macron is a warning to workers in France and internationally.

Powerful, fascistic-authoritarian forces are being mobilized by the financial aristocracy in the state security forces. Their ultimate target is the rising social anger among workers. These forces can only be fought by mobilizing the vast power of the working class—a task that requires building a Marxist-Trotskyist political vanguard in the working class, a different type of organization from LFI.

Mélenchon, whose party includes much of the police union apparatus linked to the Stalinist General Confederation of Labor (CGT) federation, constantly cuts across the struggle against police-state rule with his populist nationalism and his insistence that socialism and the working class are dead. This demoralization sown by Mélenchon’s party at every step against a political struggle to mobilize the working class in struggle against the danger posed by the police state.

At this stage, however, Mélenchon retains considerable electoral support, and the Macron government’s attack on him is an attack targeting the democratic rights of the entire working class. The response of class-conscious workers will be to defend Mélenchon against the hysterical police campaign unfolding in the government ministries, TV screens and newspaper editorials attacking him.



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