

Unsubmissive France leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon calls for massive French military build-up

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In a war-mongering interview with the *Journal de Dimanche* published Sunday, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the leader of Unsubmissive France (LFI), called for a massive military build-up and preparations by France for major wars.

“Let us consider our conception of national defense,” he said. “Is the protection of our territory guaranteed? Can we continue with a navy whose deployment on our maritime territories corresponds, in density, to having two police cars for the entire French landmass?”

“What is the operational character of [French] nuclear arms when cyberwar and presence in space enable the hacking of an adversary’s communications?” Unable to restrain his anger at the supposed insufficiency of French armaments, Mélenchon said it was “as if at the epoch of the gun we were going into battle with crossbows. In the 21st century there are three new arenas of conflict: the sea, space and cyberspace. The conditions of power are no longer the same. France must be active in all these arenas. We have all the human and technical means to do so. This would be a powerful source of innovation and collective enthusiasm.”

Mélenchon did not specify the implications of his call for “collective enthusiasm” for a military build-up. Against which countries should France be prepared to launch nuclear strikes or crippling cyberattacks? How many people would be killed in such attacks?

Mélenchon speaks and acts like an aggressive proponent of French imperialism because that is what he is. He presents the predatory ambitions of the French banks and corporations to secure control over geo-strategic resources and markets as “national defense.” His criticism of the Macron administration is from the right: that it is not sufficiently aggressive in the pursuit of these interests.

The call for an arms race as a source of “collective

enthusiasm” is a nationalist appeal to war fever that has nothing to do with left-wing, let alone Marxist politics. It is, on the other hand, a political conception that right-wing and fascist regimes of the 20th century Europe understood quite well, as they sought to divert class tensions outward through war. This is however an increasingly central element of the Mélenchon’s response to the coronavirus pandemic.

Last month, in an interview with a group of Spanish, Swiss, Italian and German newspapers, Mélenchon declared that in formulating its response to the coronavirus, LFI had carefully examined the policies pursued by the French ruling class during World War I.

“We looked in the laws of 1915–16 to see what had been done,” he explained. “French society was a peasant society; all the men were at the front and were dying in the millions. We were interested to see how social cohesion was guaranteed at that time.” This was a period in which the ruling class used militaristic, xenophobic and anti-Semitic propaganda to maintain “social cohesion” during the slaughter of World War I and suppress anti-war and socialist opposition in the international working class. This opposition finally erupted in the 1917 Russian Revolution.

As in World War I, the coronavirus pandemic has exposed before the eyes of hundreds of millions the inherent conflict between the profit interests of the capitalist elite and the defense of the lives of the working class, posing the necessity for the overthrow of capitalism. Mélenchon speaks not as a revolutionary seeking to mobilize the working class to overthrow capitalism, but as a counterrevolutionary defender of the capitalist system seeking to prevent such a movement at all costs.

Mélenchon and LFI have also been leading advocates of

the Macron administration's introduction of universal youth service. The program includes optional military service and is aimed at paving the way for the draft. In a February 2018 press conference, LFI deputy Alexis Corbière demanded a more extended national service, "which would be the basis of a citizens' National Guard that would allow us to build back up the link between the Army and the Nation."

Today, Mélenchon is responding with hostility and fear to a shift to the left in the working class. After two years of "yellow vest" protests, railway strikes across France, and growing strikes of workers internationally, there is rising opposition among workers to the ruling class' response to the pandemic. The European ruling elite used the crisis to hand itself trillions in bailouts to the banks and corporations and has enforced a return-to-work policy that is already leading to a further spread of the virus. It is now intensifying austerity to slash critical social programs and pay for its trillions in corporate handouts.

In France, Macron's newly-installed Prime Minister Jean Castex has set an accelerated agenda to finalize sweeping cuts to pensions and other social entitlements and mass job cuts. He is meeting closely with the trade union "social partners" to agree on the cuts and how to suppress opposition in the working class.

Mélenchon supports this policy. His criticisms of Macron's response to the pandemic have largely been framed from the standpoint of his failure to adopt a sufficient degree of economic planning to defend French corporate interests against its rivals.

In Sunday's interview, Mélenchon complained, "During the health crisis, our country was humiliated: we depended on China for simply tissue masks, tests and basic pharmaceutical products. Once again, planning is the key to the future to produce tomorrow's sovereign people." Planning and "sovereignty permit the reshoring [return] of economic activity."

Mélenchon routinely criticizes one or another austerity policy of the Macron administration and calls for one or another limited social spending increase, which in any case he would have no intention of carrying out if he were elected. But his nationalist economic policies would mean the adoption of trade war policies against France's imperialist rivals combined with a vast escalation of the social attacks on the working class.

Under conditions of globalized capitalist production, his demand for attracting capital from overseas into France requires slashing the wages and conditions of the French working class, cutting corporate taxes and collaborating

with the unions to suppress working class opposition. His paeans to the military and the policy of the "Sacred Union" of the French ruling class during World War I show that this would be combined with a mass build-up of a police state.

This, in fact, is what Mélenchon's allies have already implemented wherever they have come to power. In Spain, Mélenchon's ally Podemos is in power with the Socialist Party (PSOE), where it has passed a 100 billion euro bank bailout, is preparing a new round of austerity, has unleashed riot police against striking steel workers, and has pursued a reopening of the economy through the pandemic that has further spread the virus.

In Greece, the former Syriza government that came to power with Mélenchon's support implemented the most brutal austerity measures seen in decades, used riot police against anti-austerity protests, and intensified crackdowns on refugees.

While Mélenchon did not explicitly reference it, his interview reflected discussions in ruling circles of the ongoing French-Turkish conflict in the Mediterranean. France and Turkey are backing rival factions of militia in Libya that were unleashed by the French-British-US-led war for regime-change in 2011. Mélenchon supported the French neo-colonial war and fraudulently claimed that it was aimed at protecting democracy. Today, he is demanding a further military armament to be able to assert French imperialist interests against its rivals in the carve-up of the country and the region.

There is no support in the working class for the policies of austerity, police-state dictatorship and militarism that are being pursued by the European ruling class. The development of a revolutionary struggle by the working class requires the unmasking and political break from demagogues like Jean-Luc Mélenchon.



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