

Unsubmissive France leader Jean-luc Mélenchon boasts of discussion with big business

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The admission by Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the leader of the Unsubmissive France (LFI) party, that he held a telephone meeting with the head of the French employers association to discuss the competitiveness of the French economy during the coronavirus confinement demonstrates the class orientation of his organization and the other “left populist” European parties. Hostile to Marxism and the working class, they take their cue from the financial aristocracy and business leaders.

In the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, as the ruling class exposes millions to life-threatening risks and intensifies the destruction of social entitlements, the leaders of LFI and their European political allies openly collaborate with the capitalist class. This is most notable in Spain and Greece where Podemos and Syriza are or have been in government, imposing austerity that has produced a health care disaster. Were Mélenchon in government he would carry out the same policy, as evidenced by his offer to assume the post of prime minister in the previous Socialist Party government.

In his speech at the LFI summer school, Mélenchon boasted of a telephone call during the pandemic lockdown with the chairman of the employers’ federation, Medef, Geoffroy Roux de Bézieux. “I called Roux de Bézieux at the Medef,” Mélenchon said. “He has a sense of humour! He accepted the call naturally and I must say I was happily surprised.”

The LFI leader wanted to know Roux de Bézieux’s position on nationalisations and requisitions to respond to the health emergency. Mélenchon claimed that the employer head replied, “nationalisation is not a dirty word. Everything is fine.” Mélenchon explained: “I told him: ‘Since the other person (Emmanuel Macron)

won’t do anything, go ahead, requisition yourselves!’ And he told me: ‘But Mr. Mélenchon, we haven’t been waiting for your green light.’ Indeed, a number of textile production facilities have been turned over to producing masks.”

Mélenchon congratulated himself on the fact that the LFI’s response to the pandemic was correct, citing the head of French big business as proof. “This signifies that we were right to ask for it [requisitioning] everywhere in the country. If we had been in government, the general requisitioning would have been orderly, verified with at least as much intensity as that which is applied today to track down those who have forgotten to wear their mask.”

Questioned on the radio station *France Inter*, the Roux de Bézieux gave his “version of events.” Mélenchon “called me to know why we were not making enough masks, not enough respirators, why all that had gone abroad... We discussed competitiveness of French production.” He added: “On nationalisations, we spoke about Air France. I told him simply that when there is no private money to invest in a company, public money must be forthcoming. But I assure you, we do not agree on everything.”

In fact, Mélenchon’s comments demonstrate that he is complicit in the deadly policies of Macron and the Medef. Mélenchon intends to foster the illusion that a policy of nationalisations that he proposes would be more favorable to the workers. But he is in fact ready to impose austerity that he is discussing with the head of French business. Mélenchon is hostile to the actual nationalisation of corporations carried out by a revolutionary movement of the working class to take power.

In 2013, Mélenchon offered to be prime minister under unpopular President François Hollande, to carry out austerity in a Socialist Party government. He is now discreetly offering his services to Macron, while reassuring big business that he can pursue the policies of Macron and German chancellor Angela Merkel.

A nationalisation not by the working class, but as a funneling of public wealth to private corporations, is entirely compatible with Macron's policies. As Roux de Bézieux explained, the "public money which must be forthcoming." But this policy of economic stimulus and tax cuts for the rich only intensifies social inequality the exploitation of workers.

The Macron government itself flirts with references to nationalisations and economic planning, the better to fool the population. Prime Minister Jean Castex announced in July the possibility of resuscitating High Planning Commission. This body had been established in 1946 at the end of World War II, with the aim of rebuilding the economy through the financial support of American imperialism.

Limited state planning of the capitalist economy, with the aid of American subsidies, allowed the modernisation of French industry, while providing certain concessions to workers, under conditions of insurrection marked by mass workers' struggles throughout the Resistance. The context today is completely different.

The stimulus packages announced by the EU are bailouts of the banks, aimed at ensuring profits through a combination of increased exploitation of workers and greater state subsidies in a global economic and health crisis. As for boosting French "competitiveness" on the world stage, which Medef and Mélenchon discussed, it would involve the lowering of labour costs (wages), and the destruction of long-established employment entitlements.

The European workers have already paid a heavy price for such policies. The "left populist" parties in Europe represent the capitalist elite, ruthlessly applying austerity and police repression of workers.

In Spain, which is experiencing the fastest acceleration of the pandemic in Europe, with over 10,000 recorded cases on August 4 alone, the Socialist Party-Podemos government is pursuing a policy based on "herd immunity," forcing workers back to work and sending police into the factories.

In Greece, Syriza was elected in 2015 in a mass anti-austerity vote, which it betrayed within a few weeks, forming a coalition government with the far-right Independent Greeks. Faced with workers' opposition, Syriza prime minister Alexis Tsipras organized a referendum on EU austerity, hoping for a vote that would allow him to resign and save face. After the population voted "no," Tsipras agreed with Angela Merkel that he would remain prime minister and ignore the vote, strictly applying the instructions of the so-called "troika," the European Commission, European Central Bank and the IMF.

The slogan of nationalization—and expropriation—can only be advanced through an international revolutionary struggle of the working class, which poses directly the question of taking political power and the socialist organization of the economy. The vast resources expropriated from the financial aristocracy must be used to protect workers jobs and salaries as well as small businesses from bankruptcy.

The organization of an international general strike and the struggle to the overthrow the bankrupt social order of capitalism requires that workers break from the populist political parties like Unsubmissive France, and build the sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the Socialist Equality Parties, in France and internationally.



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