

Mélenchon calls for military conscription, arms buildup in France

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7 December 2020

On November 29, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the leader of Unsubmissive France, gave an interview to *L'Opinion* as part of its “Presidential election” section to outline the policies of the major candidates in the leadup to the 2022 elections. Mélenchon used the interview to advance his credentials to the ruling elite as an aggressive promoter of French imperialism’s interests around the world, who would oversee a massive increase in military spending, introduce conscription, and suppress popular opposition in the working class through police repression.

Mélenchon restated his support for France’s nuclear weapons arsenal. They remained “an irreplaceable tool for France so long as there is no military alternative,” he said. While he supported general treaties for nuclear disarmament, “there can be no question of asking France to disarm first.” In fact, France would have to conduct an arms buildup in outer space to be able to act against major powers.

“The question of the militarization of space is essential,” he continued. “Could conventional or nuclear arms be used once you are up against a space power? We must make a calm evaluation of the situation. We French are capable of putting into orbit as many satellites as we want and of providing ourselves with a system that would protect the national territory.

“As soon as it is a question of national protection, in my eyes, there are no limits,” he added. “French sovereignty is total, complete, nonnegotiable. If we do not have these capacities, we cannot be more independent, and therefore the people cannot be sovereign. Such is the republican doctrine.”

Mélenchon’s references to “republicanism” are a thin political cover for his wholehearted pursuit of the interests of French corporations and banks, including through wars for control of markets, natural resources,

and geostrategic spheres of influence. His criticism of President Emmanuel Macron is largely from the right, that Macron did not sufficiently develop French military independence or pursue French military objectives.

He criticized Macron for failing to use the October 2019 Turkish offensive in Idlib to announce a massive escalation of the nation’s military presence in the Middle East. “The moment the Turks attacked in Syria in a zone held by the Kurds, who are our allies, the decision had to be taken to convoke a meeting of NATO to validate France’s right to deploy in Syria, where they believed they had to be. I maintain that Turkey must be held to account, and there are more possible reprisals against the Turks than it appears, including through military demonstrations.”

Mélenchon called for withdrawing from NATO and said that while he could increase military spending, under NATO this “is a line of credit that we are opening for the Americans.”

His statements are in line with growing demands in the French ruling elite to develop a more independent military policy from the United States. Macron has sought to develop a closer military alliance with Germany as part of the development of a European army, with the longterm goal of being capable of acting independently of and if necessary against the US and China.

To the extent that this involves joint arms production with Germany, however, Mélenchon denounced it for undermining French imperialism’s ability to act unilaterally against Germany. “I repeat in a realistic, pacifist, and well-meaning manner our aim: France must be independent. ... What is the purpose of these joint programs with Germany to produce aircraft or tanks of the future? It permits Germany to rearm itself

and appropriate the knowledge that it didn't have.”

The Unsubmissive France leader concluded with an appeal for the return of military conscription. Pointing to the mass opposition to this measure among the millions who voted for him in 2017—many of whom falsely took him for an antiwar candidate, due to his criticism of the US-French airstrike in Syria in April 2017—Mélenchon admitted, “I’m not sure that all the Unsubmissives are in agreement with me.” However, he said, “I am in favor of conscription, and I was opposed to its suspension” by the government of Jacques Chirac in 1996. The “passive and armed popular defense remains a necessity in my eyes.”

Faced with a blowback of opposition to his comments, he published a cynical and lying Tweet on December 1, stating, “A precious detail for commentators: the citizens conscription is not a military service.” It included a graphical ad for a so-called “citizens service,” which would begin at 18 years of age, would have to be completed before the age of 25, and would span nine months. It would “include an initial military training, including the right to conscientious objection.”

His call for conscription included not only military service but for introduction into the police forces. “One can imagine that in the functions of the police, that is, the protection of civil peace, the conscripts could play a great role,” he said.

He absurdly presented this as a solution to police violence. In fact, his demand for a massive expansion of the police forces would not be aimed at rendering the police more benevolent, but at expanding police forces to suppress opposition in the working class to his own capitalist and militarist policies.

Mélenchon’s statements underscore the rapid shift to the right of the entire political establishment and its turn toward authoritarian forms of rule. The coronavirus pandemic has not only intensified the major geostrategic conflicts between the world’s major powers and their preparations for war. It has also exacerbated the tremendous levels of social inequality that are fueling growing working-class opposition that erupted in the Yellow Vest protests in France and a wave of strikes and protests by workers internationally over the past three years.

It exposed the criminal indifference to human life of the capitalist elite, which consciously permitted the

virus to spread to prevent a prolonged shutdown from impacting corporate profits.

In July, Mélenchon declared in an interview with European newspapers that in preparing its response to the coronavirus pandemic, his party had reviewed the policies of the French ruling class during World War I. “We looked to the laws of 1915-1916 to see what had been done,” he said. “French society was a peasant society; all the men were at the front and dying in the millions. We were interested to see how social cohesion was guaranteed at the time.”

In other words, he develops his policies as a defender of capitalism, seeking to prevent any movement of the working class against it and ensure “social cohesion.” During World War I, this was achieved through antisocialist, militarist and nationalist propaganda, aimed at selling the lie that French workers must protect their “fatherland” against the workers of other countries.

Today, the Macron government is responding to a new upsurge of class struggle by building up a police state. Mélenchon’s response demonstrates that were he in power, he would pursue a policy that would be in all its essentials identical.



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