

France's Jean-Luc Mélenchon appeals to President Macron against the fascistic coup-plotting military generals

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The April 21 call by over 20 retired French military generals, published in the neo-fascist magazine *Valeurs Actuelles*, for “the safeguarding of the nation,” including through a military intervention and the deaths of thousands in France, has lifted the veil on a mortal crisis of the political regime.

In 2017, then-presidential candidate Emmanuel Macron urged a vote for himself against Marine Le Pen in the name of opposing the danger of fascism. Since then, he has relied relentlessly on the security forces to repress “yellow vest” protesters, students and striking railway workers mobilised against his austerity policies. His government is now pursuing a murderous policy in response to the pandemic, has put in place a repressive “global security” law and is pushing through a new law against what his government claims is an Islamist “separatist” threat. Under these conditions, it is clear that the Macron government itself is incubating neo-fascist cliques in the state apparatus.

Any major crisis unmasks the role of political tendencies. While the Socialist Equality Party (PES) calls for the independent mobilisation of workers against the danger of a far-right coup, Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Unsubmissive France is encouraging the working class to rely on the action of Macron and the top military brass.

At a press conference on Wednesday, Mélenchon complacently downplayed the danger of a neo-fascist putsch. He asked the population “not to confuse this handful of agitators, who will be punished, with the army of the Republic, which for the most part is faithful to its obligations to the country.”

Mélenchon denounced any attempt at insurrection, calling on Macron to restore order in the state apparatus. “Directing or organising an insurrectionary movement is punishable by life imprisonment and a €750,000 fine,” he said, demanding that the government crack down on the same security forces that Macron has been applauding since he took office.

“So we must punish the guilty, and we demand the punishment of the guilty. We ask that the Minister of Justice do his job. ... We demand that the public prosecutor initiate proceedings,” Mélenchon said. He drew up a long list of senior officials whom he invited to intervene against the coup generals, starting with the Minister of the Armed Forces, Florence Parly.

We ask that the military intelligence services, two of whose retirees have signed this text, sift through it and find out who is active and who is really retired. Of those who are active, we ask that they be struck off the army. I ask her [Parly] to tell us where she stands on the punishment of those who had infiltrated the army and organised small gatherings of Nazis. Have they been expelled from the army? Are there others? Have investigations

taken place?

The main purpose of this intervention is to put workers to sleep. His attempts to reassure his voters that the coup plotters do not currently have the majority of the army with them are worthless. Thousands of officers who signed the appeal, linked to the right-wing press and to the neo-fascist presidential candidacy of Marine Le Pen, are thinking toward a military intervention on French soil, whose deaths, as the generals wrote, “will number in the thousands.”

The question is not only how to stop a neo-fascist putsch, but also how to undermine the drive to military dictatorship. Yet this process is not linked to the forces around Marine Le Pen alone. The Macron government itself, with its violent police repression and its anti-democratic laws, is just one of the governments driving the collapse of democracy.

Macron's own silence on these coup threats speaks volumes about the impotence of Mélenchon's calls on the government to stop the coup plotters. This silence is not just a personal mistake by Macron, but part of an international and historic collapse of democratic and electoral norms.

Earlier this year, on January 6, 2021, US President Donald Trump launched an attempted putsch on Capitol Hill in Washington D.C., in an attempt to prevent the US Congress from certifying the election victory of his opponent, Joe Biden. Trump attempted the coup in the face of widespread working class opposition to him and his deadly, openly laissez-faire policy on the pandemic. Security forces only stopped the putsch at the last minute, after the Pentagon delayed the deployment of the National Guard for several critical hours.

The entire ruling class in Europe knows that anger is rising among workers against economic inequality and the criminal “herd immunity” policy pursued by governments. While Europe is in its deepest economic crisis since the 1930s, it has seen more than a million coronavirus deaths. On the other hand, its billionaires have become \$1 trillion richer in a year.

Sitting on a volcano and fearing a social eruption at any moment, the ruling class is preparing to protect itself through the repression of opposition and strengthening of the state. This also promotes the growth of fascist forces, in the police and among army officers, who are terrified of the social anger they feel rising around them, and know they are indispensable to Macron and the Fifth Republic.

To pull the rug out from under the feet of the neo-fascist generals requires the independent mobilisation of the working class. This is the only perspective upon which a fight can be waged, confiscating the €2 trillion handed to the corporate elite in bailouts over the past year, imposing a scientific health policy to stop the virus and preventing the drive toward a police state, by transferring power to the workers, the vast majority of the population.

While Mélenchon rejects any independent mobilisation of the working class, even his warnings about the dangers posed by the army are intended to lull his audience to sleep. He points out that the letter appeared on the 60th anniversary of the Algiers putsch of April 21, 1961, during the Algerian war, led by generals hostile to President Charles de Gaulle's preparations to grant independence to Algeria. He states:

The 21st is the anniversary of the putsch of the felonious generals in Algeria. ... I was a bit surprised not to find more people protesting against such a document. This is the first time, in a civilised country, since the events I mentioned a moment ago, those of the Algerian war, that is to say 50 [sic] years ago, that we see retired military personnel in France intervening as a group to appeal to their active-duty colleagues to intervene, in order to reestablish I don't know what vague "civilizational" values.

If Mélenchon suggests that he is taking de Gaulle's response to the 1961 coup as a model, it is a decoy and a political trap for workers.

De Gaulle stopped the 1961 putsch by calling on the army to disobey the orders of the generals and on the French population to support him against the putschists, whose support came from the European colonists in Algeria and from sections of General Franco's fascist regime in Madrid. The French army, which was still a conscript army at the time, refused to support the putschists. The few units of paratroopers, colonial troops and the Foreign Legion loyal to the putschists were quickly isolated, and the coup attempt collapsed.

In 2021, Mélenchon is trying to build a coalition between the Macron government, the PS, Unsubmissive France and the trade union apparatuses against the far-right coup plotters, under transformed objective conditions. Not only has Macron remained deafeningly silent about the attempted coup, but the French army has an entirely different character. The professional army, experienced in the bloody crimes of the neo-colonial wars in Mali and Afghanistan, looks much more like the paratroopers of the 1960s than the conscripts of the time.

Above all, the economic foundations of European capitalism are completely rotten. De Gaulle relied on the support of the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF), which had a mass working class base, and on the economic boom of the *Trente Glorieuses* (1945-1975), which was then in full swing. Macron comes at the end of 30 years of austerity across Europe, following the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, and a million deaths in Europe (and 100,000 in France) from coronavirus.

Macron hailed the collaborationist dictator Philippe Pétain as a great soldier in 2018, before launching the riot police against the "yellow vest protesters," precisely because he himself relies on neo-fascist sentiments in the state apparatus against popular opposition.

The profound shift to the right of the capitalist political establishment in France has profoundly transformed the political forces that Mélenchon appeals to. While Industry Minister Agnès Pannier-Runacher and former PS presidential candidate Benoît Hamon all linked the current putschists to those of Algiers in 1961, Mélenchon suggested that he would easily form a political front with them:

We are not demanding any kind of exclusivity in the capacity to respond to the situation. And besides, I'm sure that, in addition to those who have already expressed themselves, and who did well to do so without delay, we will be heard and that we will consult each other.

The working class must be warned: the forces that Mélenchon wants to mobilise will do nothing against the danger of a neo-fascist coup. This is demonstrated by Mélenchon's Spanish allies, the Podemos party led by Pablo Iglesias. They have been politically complicit in threats by neo-fascist officers to launch a coup to kill "26 million" left-wing voters and break up any opposition to the policy of herd immunity pursued by the ruling social democrats and Podemos.

As deputy prime minister, Iglesias denied that there was a danger of a coup, even after the publication of WhatsApp text messages in which the generals applauded Franco, fascism and called for massacres of the left. On TVE1 TV, he said: "What these gentlemen say, at their age and retired, in a chat, having had too much to drink, poses no threat."

Mélenchon is only putting workers in France to sleep in a different way in the face of the threat of a neo-fascist coup. The organisations on which he bases himself, particularly the trade unions, have severed any connection to the working class. Indeed, the CGT reacted to the threats in *Valeurs A ctuelles* by indicating that it intends to deepen its integration into the military and intelligence community. The Stalinist union federation said in a statement:

This affair confirms the need to strengthen citizen control of areas affecting defence. The CGT underlines, in this respect, that the High Council of the Military Reserve, on which it sits, no longer meets at the frequency provided for in its rules. It is however an essential place for citizens' intervention and the indispensable link between the Army and the Nation. It is for this very reason that the CGT is in favour of recognising the right to unionise within a confederate framework for the military.

There is a profound opposition, rooted in history, among the workers of France and Europe to the danger of the extreme right. The decisive question is to break through the complacent propaganda of pseudo-left forces like Mélenchon, and to organise the workers' opposition independently of the national trade union apparatuses to fight the pandemic and the danger of a coup. In France, this requires the building of the PES as an alternative to failed pseudo-left politicians like Mélenchon.



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