

Jean-Luc Mélenchon supports anti-vaccine protest called by French neofascists

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18 July 2021

On July 17, tens of thousands participated in protest in France against mandatory coronavirus vaccination and social distancing restrictions. The protests were called and supported by neo-fascist figures, including Marion Maréchal Le Pen and Florian Philippot, the leader of the Patriots Party.

The protest took place against the backdrop of a rise of COVID-19 across Europe, driven by the Delta variant. The Macron government is rejecting scientifically-based social distancing policies, including the closure of non-essential workplaces and schools. Rather, Macron proposes only that health workers be vaccinated and that a “health pass”—demonstrating either complete vaccination, or a recent negative test result, or recent recovery from the virus—be required before entering restaurants and social events. Maréchal Le Pen and Philippot have themselves denounced obligatory vaccination and any social restriction aimed at saving lives.

Their call to let the virus spread unimpeded has won support not only among neo-fascist activists, but inside Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s Unsubmissive France (*La France insoumise*—LFI), as well as a layer of the Greens. Some Unsubmissives joined the protests of Philippot and Maréchal, which gathered thousands in several demonstrations in Paris, 5,500 in Montpellier, 4,500 in Marseille, 2,800 in Strasbourg, 2,500 in Toulouse and Nantes, 2,000 in Rennes, and 1,200 in Perpignan and Nancy.

At the head of the march in Paris were Philippot, former leader of the National Rally (RN) of Marine Le Pen; Nicolas Dupont-Aignan of the far-right party Debout la France; and Jacline Mouraud, a known “yellow vest” figure who was broadly opposed among protesters after she urged them to run for positions within the state apparatus. There were chants of “Macron resign” and “Freedom,” and signs declaring “No to mandatory vaccination. Vaccine freedom is a right,” and “Don’t

touch our children.”

The demonstration had a heterogeneous character. Among the demonstrators were health care workers wanting to denounce Macron’s policy, restaurant owners opposed to the requirement that they inspect “health passes” of their customers, and former “yellow vests.” Jerome Rodrigues, a well-known figure of the movement whose eye was shot out by the police, called for refusing vaccination, but refused to participate in the demonstration led by the neo-fascists.

However, the political character of this demonstration was clearly dominated by the extreme right. In France and around the world, the extreme right is leading the opposition to a scientifically-guided policy of vaccination and social distancing to contain the virus. This opposition is fundamentally reactionary, given that the pandemic has already killed more than four million people internationally, and 1.1 million in Europe, and is once again accelerating.

Philippot welcomed the tacit support of police for the policy of propagating the virus, saying on Twitter, “I’m meeting a surprising number of restaurant owners who have absolutely no intention of supporting the #PassSanitaire [health pass] and, even more unprecedented, police officers who tell me they have no intention of actively enforcing them... Humanity still exists.”

Marion Maréchal Le Pen, present at the protest, told the far-right *Valeurs actuelles*: “I am resolutely opposed to the mandatory vaccination against COVID and the health pass. It seems to me that the right to doubt should still be permitted in the land of Descartes!” She added, “And now, one should justify one’s state of health to a stranger to have the right to drink a coffee? There is an obvious drift taking place, a radicalisation of those who hold the reins of power.”

At the same time, neo-fascists worked to spread

confusion with false and obscene amalgams between vaccinations that could save millions, the anti-black apartheid of the South African regime in the 20th century, and the genocide of Jews in fascist Europe. The transparent purpose of this operation was to try to give a “left-wing” veneer to their extreme right-wing policy of spreading the virus through the population.

The vaccines—which in France include Pfizer, Moderna and AstraZeneca—have been scientifically tested, and their effectiveness verified in numerous studies. Their use in a scientifically-guided health policy is an urgent necessity that would save millions. They can have dangerous side effects for a few individuals per million vaccinated, but the virus kills tens of thousands per million infected. There is no scientific reason to oppose it.

Workers and small business owners are angry and suspicious of the policies pursued by Macron and the European Union, whose deaths now number in the millions. But the financial aristocracy is exploiting these feelings, promoting far-right forces, to push official politics even further to the right. Using the lies of the neo-fascists, it intends to stop any policy of mandatory vaccination and lockdowns, which would require investment in healthcare rather than bailouts for the banks and financial markets.

Among these lies is the false comparison between the protests called for by Philippot and the “yellow vest” demonstrations against social inequality and the Macron government in 2018. The “yellow vests” were demonstrating against Macron and the privileges of the rich, and enjoyed the overwhelming support, 72 percent by some polls, of the French population.

Now, neo-fascists are calling for the spread of the virus, a policy essentially supported by Macron and police agencies, while polls show that more than 70 percent of the population in France supports vaccination and the mandatory vaccination of health workers.

The political force playing the central role in confusing the issue and presenting this far-right policy as a popular one is LFI.

The leader of LFI in Picardy, François Ruffin, added his voice to the neo-fascists’ calls to protest. “I live with this as a humiliation,” Ruffin said on BFM-TV. Although vaccinated, he wanted to “fight” against mandatory vaccination. Declaring that “I call for protests,” he added that Macron, “when he has power, tends to abuse it. Here he abuses it, with this absolute monarchy ... and he must meet a limit. And that limit must be us.”

But Ruffin’s politics involve the whole of LFI, as

Mélenchon directly endorsed it in a cynical video released on Friday, in which he made it clear that he would understand those among his supporters who would join the neo-fascist protest.

On the one hand, he suggested that he was offended by the obscene political arguments of the anti-vaccine protest organizers. He implored his supporters who were going to join the far-right protest not to use political amalgams that would discredit him. He urged them to avoid “completely inappropriate language. No, the freely distributed vaccine is not apartheid and its dissemination is not the Holocaust... I call for a return to reason.”

On the other hand, Mélenchon adopted all the arguments of the far right against not only Macron’s reactionary policy, but also a scientific policy against the coronavirus.

He called the obligation to present a health pass “a profound change in our way of life,” “a considerable restriction of freedoms” and “collective conditioning that pushes everyone at every moment to feel obliged to say who they are, what they are sick with, and what they are not sick with.” He claimed that this “totally abnormal” situation would lead to “a society of permanent and universal control,” and to “a society of permanent conflict.”

These anti-scientific comments and the resulting political alignment of LFI with the far right should sound a warning to workers in France and across Europe.

As hundreds of thousands of lives are once again threatened by the spread of the Delta variant, the entire ruling elite is pursuing a murderous policy of allowing the virus to spread and infect or even kill the young, unvaccinated and vulnerable.

To prevent a new wave of deaths sanctioned by the far right and the pseudo-left from sweeping across Europe, the working class must be politically mobilised against the entire ruling elite. This requires building rank-and-file safety committees in workplaces and schools, independent of the trade union apparatuses, and the building of a European and international political movement for socialism and for a scientific fight against the pandemic.



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