

Mélenchon turns his back on his voters to negotiate with French social democrats

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After receiving 22 percent of the vote in the first round of the French presidential elections, Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Unsubmissive France (LFI) party is opening talks with the Socialist Party (PS). This turn to a discredited big-business party, which has always repudiated in deeds the cynical references to socialism that it made in its election propaganda, is a warning: Mélenchon is not trying to mobilize his voters, but to push them to the right and into a dead end.

Last Tuesday, LFI and the PS met at LFI headquarters to try to reach an accord on the June 12-19 French legislative elections. The PS National Council had suitably adopted a resolution calling for unity of all "left" forces, before announcing it was temporarily suspending talks with LFI on Friday. As for LFI, it is negotiating with the PS while calling to build a "Popular Union" with Europe Ecology-The Greens (EELV), a party that openly supported President Emmanuel Macron, but also the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF) and the Pabloite New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA).

LFI's decision to seek an alliance with the PS again exposes the unprincipled character of Mélenchon's maneuvers. In the run-up to the April 24 presidential runoff between Macron and neo-fascist candidate Marine Le Pen, the *Parti de l'égalité socialiste* (PES), the French section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), campaigned for workers and youth to boycott a fraudulent election between these two extreme-right candidates. The PES explained that only an irreconcilable rejection of both candidates would prepare workers for the struggles to come against the next president.

Mélenchon already declared himself ready, before the April 24 second round, to serve as prime minister under either Macron or Le Pen. "I ask the French people to elect me as prime minister" by electing "an LFI majority" in the legislative elections, he told BFM-TV on April 19. Asked whether he would serve either under Macron or the neo-fascist Le Pen, Mélenchon replied that this matter was of "secondary" importance.

LFI is turning its back on millions of its voters in the working class and youth to instead maneuver with the PS, which has responded by suspending negotiations with LFI and denouncing it as a threat to the European Union.

Former PS President François Hollande, who was so hated after five years in office that he did not dare run for a second term in 2017, criticized the planned LFI-PS alliance. "The PS must be true to its own history," he claimed, criticizing LFI's program: "This places in question the very history of socialism."

Hollande indicated that any PS-LFI alliance would be founded on a repudiation of the promises of social reforms LFI made in its program. "If programs are designed to be put in practice," Hollande said, "this would mean that the next government would ... disobey European treaties? A next government, were it to be formed, if it had a majority, would it leave NATO? Would it no longer aid the Ukrainians by giving them military equipment?"

Former PS Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, who retired from public life after being eliminated from the second round of the 2002 presidential election by neo-fascist candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen, adopted a more conciliatory position, speaking to *Le Parisien*. Jospin said Mélenchon's "duty is to build an alliance," but that he is "not sure that certain themes and the style of LFI will build a majority on the left." Nevertheless, Jospin proposed that the PS find "an electoral accord with the entire left."

Jospin stressed his concern over the 2022 election collapse of the PS and the Gaullists, the two tendencies that dominated official French politics in the period after the May 1968 French general strike. PS candidate Anne Hidalgo and Valérie Pécresse, the candidate of the Gaullist The Republicans (LR) party, were both eliminated with less than 5 percent of the vote.

"Emmanuel Macron built behind him a heterogeneous conglomerate without any clear identity. He did everything to set up another confrontation with the far right, which he considered easier to beat," Jospin said, stressing his fear of the "disintegration of our political system." He added,

“Abstention is considerable, and the far right has grown even further. The two parties that, on the right and the left, controlled the democratic debate of earlier times and offered political alternatives to the country, have been marginalized.”

Jospin laid out the cynical calculations of a layer in the PS that aims to use LFI’s presidential vote to give itself a new face and stabilize an unpopular political establishment. Indeed, PS Party Secretary Olivier Faure made similar arguments. Criticized Tuesday night at a PS national committee by a PS minority critical of allying with LFI, Faure said such an alliance was the only way to prevent the PS from being absorbed into Macron’s party, The Republic on the March (LRM).

Faure said, “If you think the PS is dead, that there is nothing to be done, that you no longer are on the left, then leave. Join LRM. Otherwise, stay and struggle together with us. It will transform us.”

Faure’s arguments are lies coming from a party that, over four decades, has imposed austerity and war on the workers. He aims to make voters forget, among other things, the reactionary presidency of Hollande, the anti-worker labor decrees of its El Khomri law, its anti-democratic state of emergency, and its pillaging of society in the interests of the banks. The question that is truly posed by the proposed LFI-PS alliance is not what the reactionary PS is trying to do but, rather: why is LFI negotiating with it?

The PES has explained that LFI is objectively in a powerful position. Having won the working class districts of major cities, it could mobilize masses of workers in strikes against an unpopular president who was elected only because he was facing an even more unpopular, neo-fascist rival; against surging prices that are ruining workers; and against NATO war targeting Russia. Such strikes could not only shut down the French economy, but also initiate a struggle of the international working class against capitalism and imperialist war.

But LFI, a petty-bourgeois party based in layers of academics and trade union bureaucrats, is hostile to launching a struggle against imperialism. It rejects the Trotskyist perspective advanced by the PES, preferring its nationalist conception of a “citizens revolution” in a new “era of the people,” which entails a parliamentary deal with the reactionary PS. Instead of mobilizing its voters against war and austerity, LFI presses them to take as good coin the cynical promises of the PS.

Manuel Bompard, LFI’s representative in talks with the PS, hailed “positive” discussions with PS spokesman Pierre Jovet. “We did not feel we were speaking with the same PS as two-three years ago,” Bompard said, adding that there is “no problem arising in discussions that seems

insurmountable” with the PS, including “on pensions or the European question.”

Bompard made clear that the PS aims to make the French people forget the policies it carried out in power: “It clearly has a desire to present the appearance of a break with the PS of François Hollande; they had no difficulty to promise to abrogate their El Khomri law, to build a new Sixth Republic, to block price increases, which for us are critical issues.”

LFI lawmaker Mathilde Panot speaking to Sud Radio stressed that such alliances were at the heart of LFI’s strategy in the legislative elections: “We can use these legislative elections which, by the way, are a way to also overthrow the presidential monarchy in which we live, to make Jean-Luc Mélenchon prime minister, not only to place Mélenchon in the Matignon palace, but to really put our program in action.”

The conception promoted by LFI that it can put a progressive program into practice under a Macron or Le Pen presidency is another political lie. The argument, which lulls workers to sleep amid the danger of war and far-right dictatorship, aims above all to regroup all of the current or former allies of the old PS-PCF Union of the Left formed in 1972, to block a movement of workers and youth to the left.

Jospin and Mélenchon have long sought to unify Stalinist and social-democratic forces and their political satellites to build capitalist governments and attack the workers.

Both men began their political careers in the *Organisation communiste internationaliste* (OCI) as it broke with the ICFI, whose section today is the PES. After splitting the ICFI and repudiating Trotskyism in 1971, the OCI backed the Union of the Left. Jospin and Mélenchon both were members of the OCI and the PS, ultimately working closely with PS President François Mitterrand. Jospin became prime minister and Mélenchon a minister in the PS-led “Plural Left” government of 1997-2002, whose unpopularity led Jospin to be eliminated in the 2002 presidential election.

A clear and unambiguous warning must be made about the “Popular Union” Mélenchon is seeking to build with the PS. It is not a revolutionary, socialist or working class movement, but an unprincipled petty-bourgeois bloc aiming to stabilize the Macron government. For workers and youth, the urgent task is to break with petty-bourgeois pseudo-left parties like LFI, and to build the PES as the Trotskyist alternative to the drive of the bourgeoisie towards war, far-right dictatorship and austerity.



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