

Amid mounting danger of NATO-Russia nuclear war over Ukraine

Mélenchon's Unsubmissive France party implodes over concocted domestic violence scandal

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In the past week, Russian and NATO officials have threatened to use strategic nuclear weapons that could claim hundreds of millions of lives in Europe. Meanwhile, France and Europe stand on the edge of a major economic and social crisis, with major energy and food shortages likely in the months ahead.

Amid this crisis, however, the French media has been obsessed with the personal life of Unsubmissive France (LFI) ex-deputy leader Adrien Quatennens over the past two weeks. The scandal has set off a crisis in the New Popular Ecological and Social Union (NUPES) coalition, in which Jean-Luc Mélenchon's LFI is the largest party.

On September 12, the weekly *Le Canard Enchaîné* published a leaked legal complaint lodged against Quatennens by his wife Céline, with whom he is in divorce proceedings. In a statement on September 18, Quatennens admitted to snatching his wife's phone from her hands and slapping her once "in a context of extreme tension and mutual aggression." The private complaint appears to have been illegally leaked by the police.

The complaint, made by Céline Quatennens to chart the deterioration of her relationship with her husband, is of a noncriminal nature. There has been no charge of physical assault or any other crime against Adrien Quatennens. Throughout the scandal, his wife's stated wish that the issue remain private has been ignored by the media.

In response, Quatennens announced his withdrawal from the LFI leadership in a September 18 statement. Before his resignation, he was widely seen as LFI leader Jean Luc Mélenchon's potential successor. Despite his resignation, the campaign has continued, with activists demanding he also resign his seat in the National Assembly, to which he was reelected earlier this year.

The WSWs holds no brief for Quatennens, an operative whose record reflects the bankrupt, pseudo-left politics of the LFI. He reliably supported the French war in Mali and spoke sympathetically on far-right protests by police officers in 2019.

It is apparent, however, that the French media and right-wing feminist forces around the #MeToo movement are concocting a massive scandal out of thin air. Their target is the party that carried the working class districts of most of France's main cities in this year's presidential elections. Calls to expel Quatennens from the National Assembly, i.e., to overturn an election based on a media frenzy initiated by the police, are deeply anti-democratic.

The goal of this operation is not to protect victims of domestic violence. It is to distract from mounting concern among workers over the war and whether they will be able to purchase food and heat their homes this winter, while entrenching the media influence of France's #MeToo operatives.

On September 20, 500 "militant feminists" from the #relevéfeminism collective, including many members of LFI and the NUPES coalition, published a letter in the daily *Libération* arguing that Quatennens' withdrawal from LFI party life was insufficient. Even though he 'is not at this stage the subject of a judicial conviction,' it said, he should also be forced to resign as a deputy in the National Assembly. It claimed that Quatennens' "confession makes him politically responsible. ... The aggressors and perpetrators of violence cannot represent our political struggles."

Top LFI officials have denounced Quatennens for domestic abuse, despite the noncriminal nature of his wife's complaint. After Quatennens' statement, LFI

deputy Danièle Obono tweeted out a statement titled, “a slap is a violent act.” She added, “We see a world fractured by these violent acts. The class struggle is full of these violent acts. ... Our friends, fathers, lovers, brothers commit these acts of violence.”

The press campaign also targeted Mélenchon. After the resignation of Quatennens, he tweeted, “Adrien decided to take it all on himself. I salute his dignity and his courage. I express my trust and affection for him.” He also denounced “police malpractice” and “media voyeurism.”

Caroline De Haas, a #NousToutes (#AllUsWomen) activist and member of the big-business Socialist Party (PS), which is also part of the NUPES coalition, denounced Mélenchon’s tweet as “a catastrophe.” French Prime Minister Elizabeth Borne, a member of President Macron’s Renaissance Party (formerly, La République En Marche!), stated that Mélenchon’s “extremely shocking” response “trivialized intra-familial violence.”

Révolution Permanente (RP), a website published by the pseudo-left French Morenoites, joined in the outrage of this reactionary campaign. An article attacked Mélenchon’s remarks as “largely shocking” and for having provoked a “legitimate outcry.”

The “militant feminists” of LFI, NUPES, RP and Macron’s government have found allies amongst the far right. Jordan Bardella, interim president of Marine Le Pen’s far-right National Front (RN), described the incident as the “moral wreckage of the left” and complained that Mélenchon was “defending the aggressor.”

On Friday, the media campaign intensified after LFI deputy Manuel Bompard commented that “a slap is never acceptable, but a slap is not equal to a man beating his wife every day.” In response, Macron’s equality minister Isabelle Rome tweeted to denounce “despicable statements that trivialize violence.” Green Party councilor and NUPES member Raphaëlle Rémy-Leleu stated that Bompard’s remarks were “making us [women] suffer.”

One might conclude from this wave of hypocrisy that France’s 35 million women are more at risk from Adrien Quatennens’ right hand than they are from the threats of nuclear war, food shortages and energy cutoffs in Europe.

In reality, not one of these official comments of outrage over Quatennens’ supposedly intolerable violence have an ounce of credibility. The Macron government and the PS waged a nearly decade-long war in Mali in which they repeatedly bombed civilians, killing men, women and children. As for Bardella, who denounces the alleged

violence of the left, he is leading a party whose founder, Jean-Marie Le Pen, is primarily known for torturing Algerian civilians and denying the Holocaust.

One final question is raised, however: Why has the LFI imploded in the face of the media campaign against Quatennens? It reflects the enormous influence of middle class identity politics in bankrupt pseudo-left parties like the LFI.

During this April’s presidential elections, Mélenchon’s party won nearly 8 million votes, largely concentrated among urban workers. Having narrowly missed qualifying for the second round, Mélenchon did not try to mobilize the power of his electorate against war, austerity or the indifference to COVID-19 of both Macron and his opponent, neo-fascist Marine Le Pen. Refusing to call strikes or protests, he worked to defuse the political momentum he had acquired through the vote. Indeed, Mélenchon announced that he could serve as prime minister under either Macron or Le Pen.

It was an unmistakable sign that the LFI was doing everything it could to strangle the development of opposition in the working class to France’s bankrupt ruling elites.

Now, as this establishment whips up a frenzy against Quatennens, the LFI again has no substantial opposition to propose: It has itself supported the NATO wars and the bank bailouts that are driving the surge of prices. It is therefore incapable of pointing out the hypocrisy of its right-wing critics’ denunciations of violence and moreover hostile to mobilizing the working class in its own defense.

The Quatennens affair again shows that a movement of opposition to imperialist war and social inequality must be organized by the working class independently of the pseudo-left milieu of LFI and in opposition to the entire ruling establishment.



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