

Mélenchon pushes fight against French pension cuts into parliamentary dead end

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Working class anger at President Emmanuel Macron's pension cuts and brutal police repression remains strong. An overwhelming majority of workers saw Macron's imposition of pension cuts that they opposed without even a parliamentary vote as proof that Macron rules against the people, with two-thirds calling to strike and block the economy. Millions went on strike and joined national one-day strike protests called by the union bureaucracies between January 19 and May 1.

This situation is again exposing the class gulf separating the *Parti de l'égalité socialiste* (PES) from petty-bourgeois pseudo-left parties like Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Unsubmissive France (LFI) party. The PES insisted that France and Europe are passing through an objectively revolutionary situation, a direct struggle between the working class and the capitalist state. Calling to mobilize workers independently of the union bureaucracies, the PES called to bring down Macron with a general strike.

As for LFI, it is complicit in the union bureaucracies' attempts to demobilize the strike against pension cuts and the massive arming of French militarism that these cuts aim to finance. Indeed, the union bureaucracies reacted to the massive May Day marches by postponing all further national actions until today. LFI advanced the impotent perspective of waiting until today and pressuring the National Assembly to vote a bill to cancel Macron's cuts.

In a video on his blog, after having hailed the alliance between the unions and the "left," Mélenchon declared: "We have a rendezvous at the National Assembly. A parliamentary group, the LIOT [the right-wing Liberty, Independance, Overseas Territories], with whom we presented a censure motion that nearly passed with only 9 votes missing, will propose a bill to abrogate article 7

of the reform that increases the pension age to 64. We will propose amendments. We will not oppose doing good in the name of the need to do better. LFI parliamentarians will try to bring the law down. We will see who votes which way, and who does not vote."

In reality, the majority of the Assembly is favorable to Macron's cuts and made this clear by refusing to censure Macron when he imposed his pension cuts without a vote in the Assembly. Mélenchon therefore called on the French people to contact their deputies to try to change their minds. "No one wants this conflict to last," Mélenchon claimed. However, he added that the world needs to see that "the French people will not give up."

François Ruffin, who is being groomed to replace Mélenchon as LFI leader, made similar points. He told BFM-TV he is "confident" about the bill to abrogate the pension cuts that is to be debated on June 8 in the Assembly. Ruffin said he would vote for the bill "without hesitation, with both hands, both feet, whatever is necessary."

Mélenchon and Ruffin are sowing illusions in the bill drafted by the bourgeois LIOT group, which has virtually no chance of passing. The LIOT group has already presented the bill to censure Macron for imposing his cuts without a vote, but the Assembly voted it down. Even if its present bill were adopted in the Assembly, it would face the opposition of the right-wing majority in the French Senate.

The goal of Mélenchon's maneuvers is to turn workers away from the need to organize the class struggle independently of the union bureaucracies who are negotiating with Macron, and to subordinate workers to reactionary groups of parliamentarians.

Macron is waging a class war to impose on workers the costs of economic crisis, inflation, the COVID-19

pandemic and war. Macron and the ruling class are slashing social spending, diverting tens of billions of euros each year towards the military and Macron's "European war economy."

LFI has remained deafeningly silent on the fact that the date chosen by the union bureaucracies for the next nationwide protest strike—today—is also the day of the vote on the Military Programming Law (LPM). LFI is helping Macron suppress debate on the law, which uses funds taken from pensions by Macron's cuts to raise military spending 40 percent, to hit €413 billion in 2024-2030. Mélenchon and LFI support the NATO war in Ukraine, hide the link between the pension cuts and imperialist war, and aim to strangle working class opposition to Macron.

Mélenchon's main concern is that Macron's aggressive policies could provoke an uncontrollable social explosion, like the May 1968 general strike, that could short-circuit the union bureaucracies, and bring down Macron and the capitalist state. This is why Mélenchon repeatedly declares, about the pensions struggle, that "no one wants this conflict to last."

LFI is a petty-bourgeois organization defending the capitalist order against socialist revolution. The LFI leadership's conscious hostility to socialism is clearly documented in Mélenchon's own writings. He rejects the notion of socialist revolution by the working class as supposedly outmoded, and advances a vague populism to cover up his support for the "social dialog" between Macron and the union bureaucracies.

In his book *The Era of the People*, Mélenchon even warned his readers against what he saw as the danger of a workers' insurrection. He wrote, "I well know that the energy of immense masses trapped in a dead end can lead to eruptions on the bad side of the volcano. The disease is highly advanced. It will not be repaired with learned explanations distinguishing the true left from the false one. Here, the people must take the place that previously was occupied by the 'revolutionary working class' in the plans of the left."

He demanded "getting beyond" socialism, declaring: "The citizens revolution, it is not the old socialist revolution."

LFI does not seek to mobilize workers more broadly, even though Mélenchon won almost 8 million votes of workers and youth in the 2022 presidential elections. Mélenchon turned around and promptly proposed

himself as a potential prime minister both for Macron and neo-fascist candidate Marine Le Pen. Instead of rallying working class opposition to whoever the next president would be, he stressed that he would collaborate with the next head of state—even if this official was a neo-fascist.

By declaring himself open to work with either Macron or Le Pen, Mélenchon indicated that he is willing to cover for policies of austerity and war. When LFI's sister parties have been in power, in Greece or in Spain, these parties carried out European Union austerity policies, supported imperialist wars and strangled political opposition in the working class. SYRIZA repudiated its promises to Greek workers to halt EU austerity, while Podemos in Spain repressed mass strikes and armed the Ukrainian neo-Nazis of the Azov Battalion.

The PES warns against any illusions in Mélenchon and the pseudo-left, who aim to block a revolutionary struggle of the working class by sowing illusions in reactionary capitalist institutions. The struggle to bring down Macron requires a ruthless political break with the union bureaucracies and pseudo-left charlatans like Mélenchon.

Workers need to create their own independent organizations of struggle, rank and file committees bound together in the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, and build the PES as the Trotskyist, revolutionary alternative to Mélenchon and LFI.



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