

After Macron's snap election call, which way forward against neofascism and war?

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Today, hundreds of thousands of people will march against the far right in cities across France, after President Emmanuel Macron reacted to far-right parties' gains in the June 9 European elections by dissolving the French parliament and calling snap elections for June 30 and July 7. There is mounting concern among workers and youth over the growth of the neofascist National Rally (RN).

Immediately after the election was announced, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, leader of the France Unbowed (LFI) party, announced the creation of a "New Popular Front." This is a political trap for those seeking to halt the rise of the far right and police-state militarism. It aims to block a struggle for socialism by subordinating workers to a debilitating alliance with parties of capitalist government like the bourgeois Socialist Party (PS), the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF) and the Greens. These corrupt parties can only lead their followers to disaster.

Speaking of his alliance with the PS and PCF, Mélenchon said on June 10:

We spoke today to confront the country's historic situation after the results of the European elections and the dissolution of the National Assembly. We call for the constitution of a new popular front gathering in an unprecedented form all the humanist, trade union, nongovernmental and citizens' left forces.

For the first time since the fall of the Nazi-collaborationist Vichy regime in 1944, the far right is poised to form a government in France. It is moving ever closer to power, moreover, as the NATO powers back genocide in Gaza and unleash their first war against Russia since the Nazi war of annihilation against the Soviet Union.

Macron has called these elections with the first round just before and the second round just after the July 4 snap elections in Britain, and before a July 9 NATO war summit in Washington. This summit will discuss plans by Macron and other officials to escalate the NATO war with Russia in Ukraine. These plans are opposed by 70 percent of the population in France and 80 percent in Germany. Macron aims to use the snap elections to prepare the ruling establishment to wage war on working class opposition at home so it can wage imperialist war abroad.

Mélenchon pledges that his Popular Front coalition will now "advance a program that makes a clean break, listing measures to be taken during the first 100 days of the Popular Front government." He adds, "Our goal is to govern to respond to democratic, ecological and social emergencies and for peace."

But Mélenchon's Popular Front is not a force for peace and democracy. Its perspective is a government standing on capitalist property relations, defending the interests of French imperialism. It ties workers and youth to the pro-austerity PS, which supports war with Russia under the guise of "aid to Ukraine," and whose record of back-channel ties to the far right dates to its foundation in 1971 by the former Nazi-collaborationist François Mitterrand.

The term "Popular Front" is associated with the worst betrayals of the working class. In the 1930s, it supported Stalinist slanders against Trotsky in the Moscow Trials and blocked a struggle of the working class for power and for socialism during the 1936 French general strike. The liberal and social-democratic parliamentarians of the French Popular Front ultimately in their majority voted dictatorial powers to Vichy leader Philippe Pétain in 1940.

The first challenge in fighting the resurgence of the far right is to explain how it came to pass. How is it that, in what was long considered one of Europe's most left-wing countries, in which a mass movement of armed resistance

to Vichy developed in the working class, that the political heirs of Vichy are poised to take power?

It is not that mass fascist paramilitary organizations like the Nazi Brown Shirts or the French *Milice* have emerged. But unlike fascist leaders of Hitler's era, who had to fight mass communist parties in the working class, the far right today does not need such militias to grow. It gains strength firstly from the imperialist bourgeoisie's relentless pursuit of war, austerity, and social inequality, to which the neofascists give the most determined expression.

Moreover, the neofascists feed off the bitterness and confusion produced among workers and middle-class people by decades of betrayals by social democracy, Stalinism and descendants of renegades from Trotskyism.

Mélenchon's claim that his Popular Front's policies are new is perhaps his greatest lie of all: It is repeating what Mélenchon has done for a half-century.

He began in Pierre Lambert's *Organisation communiste internationaliste* (OCI) as the OCI broke with the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), the leadership of the world Trotskyist movement. The OCI rejected Trotskyism to instead support the "Union of the Left" between the PCF and the PS. Mélenchon himself joined the PS in 1976.

After Mitterrand took power in 1981 and swiftly abandoned his election promises and instead imposed austerity, Mélenchon became a senator. He worked closely with Mitterrand as the PS government joined the US-led war in Iraq in 1990-1991 and helped form the pro-business European Union. After Mitterrand died, Mélenchon was a PS minister in the 1997-2002 pro-austerity "Plural Left" government.

In the 21st century, after the disintegration of the PCF's mass working class base amid the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union, he became a leading promoter of the populist theories of middle-class anti-Marxists. In his 2014 *The Era of the People*, he wrote that "the people takes the place that the 'revolutionary working class' once occupied in the politics of the left." Calling to "get beyond socialism," he advocated a "peoples' revolution," stressing "it is not the old socialist revolution."

These anti-worker, anti-socialist and anti-Trotskyist arguments must be rejected. Threats of war and neofascist rule irrefutably show that capitalism is in a mortal crisis. The way forward is for the European and international working class to revive its connections to the heritage of the October Revolution. Workers must take control of world economy and industry from the war-mad capitalist

aristocracy before it mounts a military escalation that could trigger a nuclear conflagration.

The far right's rise indicates not the impossibility, but the urgency of the struggle for socialism. Trotsky made this point about the danger of the growth of support for fascism in the mass peasantry of France in the 1930s.

In *Whither France*, as he fought to found the Fourth International against the Popular Front between Stalinists, social democrats and liberals, he wrote:

It is false, thrice false, to affirm that the present petty bourgeoisie is not going to the working-class parties because it fears "extreme measures." Quite the contrary. The lower petty bourgeoisie, its great masses, only see in the working-class parties parliamentary machines. They do not believe in their strength, nor in their capacity to struggle, nor in their readiness this time to conduct the struggle to the end.

Today's rising far-right vote, mainly among rural workers and workers in areas deindustrialized by successive PS governments, does not mean these workers oppose class struggle. Many have joined explosive movements like the 2018-2019 "yellow vest" protests against social inequality. However, they can only be won from the far right based on a determined, Trotskyist struggle against NATO, Macron and the corrupt bureaucracies of today's Popular Front.

The *Parti de l'égalité socialiste* (PES), the French section of the ICFI, advocates the broadest protests and strikes against fascism and imperialist war. Military escalation and austerity will bring Macron and NATO into collision with the workers in France and internationally. But to prosecute this struggle, it is necessary to build rank-and-file organizations of struggle in the working class, opposing fascism and war in an international movement for socialism.



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