

# French New Popular Front issues election program for war and police-state rule

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The New Popular Front (NFP) formed by Jean-Luc Mélenchon's "populist" France Unbowed (LFI) party has issued its program for the June 30-July 7 French snap elections as a special issue of the Stalinist daily *L'Humanité*.

The central issues in the snap elections Macron called, after a far-right surge in the June 9 European elections, are war and the threat of far-right rule. The far-right National Rally (RN) is at the gates of power, with polls currently showing it falling just short of a majority in the National Assembly. Just after the July 4 snap elections in Britain and the July 7 French snap elections, the NATO alliance will hold a July 9 summit in Washington to prepare a massive escalation of the war with Russia.

On these decisive issues, the NFP does not offer an alternative for workers to Macron's police-state regime or to the RN. The NFP program proclaims itself "A program to break with the policies of Emmanuel Macron" and denounces "the racist, social austerity policies of the far right." But it consists of an alliance of LFI with the big-business Socialist Party (PS), the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF), the Greens and the Pabloite New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA).

The program adopted by the NFP confirms that these parties are participating in the right-wing restructuring of French politics the ruling class aims to implement via the snap elections, in order to prepare military escalation abroad and class war at home. The program calls to send troops to Ukraine and to strengthen the military police and intelligence services.

The NFP program reflects not the interests of the working class, but of the class base of the parties that have joined it. The NFP is not the Popular Front of the 1930s, which included the social-democratic and a Stalinist party that both had a mass base in the working class. Its social base is an alliance between the bourgeoisie and affluent layers of the middle class in academia and the union bureaucracy grounded in racial and gender identity politics.

The French ruling class has expended vast resources, in the half-century since the PCF's sell-out of the May 1968 general strike, on promoting these forces as the "left." But the PS, the PCF and the Greens repeatedly formed governments—in 1981-1995, 1997-2002, and 2012-2017—that waged war and slashed living standards. The formation of the NFP is a warning: pseudo-left descendants of renegades from Trotskyism, like LFI and the NPA, are also prepared to implement this program, including war with Russia that threatens to lead to the use of nuclear weapons.

Imperialism has a rendezvous with catastrophe. There is deep-rooted opposition among workers and youth in France and all NATO countries to escalation against Russia, to the Gaza genocide and to neo-fascist rule. Whatever government emerges from the French snap elections, even if it includes the NFP, it will be on a collision course with the working class.

But the war, the rise of the RN and its promotion in capitalist media are a warning: spontaneous opposition in strikes and protests will not defeat the next government. The ruling class works relentlessly to ensure that the treachery of the PS, LFI and their allies and the bitterness it produces in the working class profits the neo-fascists. The working class faces a ruling

class intent on waging war against the will of the people and using a fascistic police state to repress popular opposition.

## The New Popular Front praises peace but embraces war with Russia

The NFP program proclaims "the urgency of peace" but backs Macron's overwhelmingly unpopular call to send French troops to Ukraine. Pledging to "checkmate the aggressive war of Vladimir Putin," it calls to "defend the sovereignty and liberty of Ukraine's people and the inviolability of its borders." It demands "the necessary delivery of weapons" to Ukraine and "sending peacekeepers to defend nuclear power plants."

This is a cynical attempt to lull the public to sleep as NATO prepares a catastrophic escalation of the war. A Eurasia Group poll has found that 94 percent of Americans and 88 percent of West Europeans want to end the Ukraine war via a negotiated settlement. But, in lockstep with the ruling class, the NFP tries to find a disguise, such as "peacekeeping," for NATO's wars of plunder.

Should French troops deploy to Ukraine, they will not be engaged in peacekeeping. They will enter into a devastating war that has already claimed over a half-million lives, as Macron and his NATO allies escalate the imperialist carve-up of the world they have sought to carry out throughout the post-Soviet era.

The PS and PCF have a long record of militarism ever since the 1991 Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union eliminated the main political-military obstacle to neo-colonial wars. These include joining the 1991 Gulf War against Iraq, the 2001 NATO invasion of Afghanistan, and, in the 2010s, wars in Libya, Syria and Mali. Remarkably, even though France has been engaged for over a decade in military operations in Syria and Africa, the NFP program is totally silent about them.

Putin's invasion of Ukraine was indubitably reactionary and must be opposed, but the working class cannot determine how to respond to the NATO-Russia war just by asking who fired first. Preventing an even greater catastrophe and stopping the war requires, first of all, opposing further escalation by the NATO imperialist powers.

The NFP's claim that this war aims to protect "liberty" in Ukraine is a lie. The Ukrainian regime is a NATO-backed dictatorship. Its president, Volodymyr Zelensky, has suspended elections, and the regime is staffed by worshippers of World War II-era Nazi collaborationist Stepan Bandera. It bans opposition parties, and its army recruiters forcibly drag civilians into the army. NATO is not fighting for liberty in Ukraine, but has hijacked Ukraine to wage imperialist war on Russia.

NATO's aims in the war with Russia were laid out bluntly by Polish President Andrzej Duda at the recent Ukraine summit in Switzerland. Under the fraudulent banner of war against "colonialism," he declared

that there is “no more space” for Russia in the modern world and called to carve it up into 200 statelets that could be dominated by imperialism. Duda said:

Russia is often called the prison of nations, and for a good reason. It is home to over 200 ethnic groups, most of whom became residents of Russia as a result of the methods used in Ukraine today. Russia remains the largest colonial empire in the world today, which unlike the European powers has never undergone the process of decolonization, and has never been able to deal with the demons of its past. There is no more space for colonialism in the modern world.

This is a critique not from the left but from the right, of the reactionary Russian capitalist regime established through Stalinism’s dissolution of the Soviet Union.

NATO, whose documents call for a “strategic defeat” of Russia, advances a desperate strategy of world conquest. It aims to resolve by war the long-term, continuing erosion of the economic position of the NATO imperialist powers. It seeks to force regime-change in Moscow, partition Russia, loot its oil and strategic minerals, force it to withdraw its military support from Syria and other countries targeted by NATO, and use it as a base for a neo-colonial war on China.

Neither French nor European capitalism has undergone the process of decolonization nor dealt “with the demons of its past.” The neo-colonial war offensive the European imperialist powers are waging alongside Washington has gone hand-in-hand with the entrenchment of neo-fascism and support for genocide at the heart of official European politics. Workers and youth must be alerted to the danger of escalation and decisively reject both the NATO war against Russia and the NFP’s support for it.

### **Genocide in Gaza: Mélenchon throws his criticisms “into the river”**

The NFP’s thoroughly reactionary position on the Gaza genocide is the product of Mélenchon’s strategy of making boundless concessions to the PS and imperialism. When he announced the NFP and publicly offered an alliance to the PS, he proclaimed: “[We] throw our differences into the river.” One result of this is the NFP’s thoroughly reactionary position on the Gaza genocide, which falls in line with the longstanding support of PS governments for the Israeli regime.

The NFP program does not acknowledge that a genocide is underway in Gaza. Moreover, it cynically equates the actions of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the oppressed population of Gaza. It maintains the policy of all the parties in the NFP alliance of rejecting calls to mobilize the industrial power of the working class internationally to halt the shipment of arms to Israel and stop the genocide.

Denouncing “the terrorist massacres of Hamas, whose theocratic program we reject” and endorsing “the International Criminal Court’s charges against leaders of Hamas and the Netanyahu government,” it calls:

To break with the French government’s guilty support for the far-right supremacist government of Netanyahu, to impose an immediate cease-fire in Gaza and to enforce the decrees of the International Court of Justice that evokes, unambiguously, a

danger of genocide.

But it is false to state that there is “danger” of genocide in Gaza. A genocide is unfolding in real time in Gaza, as the Israeli regime bombs defenseless civilians, sends death squads to murder the wounded and the sick in Gaza’s few remaining hospitals, and denies food, water, electricity and medical care to two million people.

The NFP’s decision to minimize the reality of the unfolding genocide in Gaza is a warning: An NFP government, were it to come to power, would try to continue what it admits is the “guilty support” of Paris for the Zionist regime. Workers and youth in France must be alerted to the situation in Spain, where the social-democrats hold power in alliance with the Spanish allies of Mélenchon in the Sumar party. Madrid has issued empty statements condemning the genocide and calling for an independent Palestinian state, while continuing to ship weapons to Israel.

Stopping genocide and war requires mobilizing the working class in France and internationally against imperialism, independently of the parties and union bureaucracies that support the NFP.

### **Defending workers’ living standards requires opposing world war, genocide and capitalism**

The NFP program and talking points distributed to its members contain a large array of legitimate social measures. These include proposals like “insuring that housing is fully insulated by reinforcing subsidies for all families” and “ensuring one-euro meals in university cafeterias.” If the RN can win workers’ votes, however, this is in no small part because workers have a long experience in which PS-led governments were elected and then betrayed their election promises in a year, or even in weeks.

The key social measures in the NFP’s election program are those that directly address the historic onslaught against wages and social rights that is now underway. These include “Blocking price increases for essential goods in food, energy, and fuel”, “Increasing salaries by raising the [monthly] minimum wage to €1,600 after-tax”, and “Immediate abrogation of Macron’s decree raising the retirement age to 64.”

The bankruptcy of this program flows from its national orientation. Prices for food and energy in a globalized capitalist economy are set by world markets dominated by the major international banks who have reaped massive fortunes from the devastating surge in prices over the last four years, the greatest such inflationary wave in a half-century. Workers cannot defend living standards without making inroads against capitalist property, working together internationally to wrest control of these resources from the hands of the capitalist class.

In particular, stopping the downward spiral in living standards requires ending the wars which the NFP supports. NATO’s decision to limit its purchases of Russian oil and gas and to cut off exports of Russian grain via Baltic Sea ports has played a central role in the global wave of inflation. It has also directly driven draconian attacks on fundamental social rights.

Last year, Macron provoked strikes and mass protests by imposing pension cuts overwhelmingly rejected by the French people without a parliamentary vote. The tens of billions of euros taken from pensioners were spent on plans for a vast €100 billion increase in military spending over the rest of the decade. However, the union bureaucracies that initially called protests in response to mass outrage against Macron’s cuts and his anti-democratic methods suddenly ended the protests and failed to criticize the military budget increase.

LFI, now the largest force in the NPF has made clear its support for the continued diversion of financial resources to the war build-up. LFI official François Ruffin, who first issued the call on social media for the New Popular Front, told *Le Monde* that his policy on Russia is to strengthen France's war machine. He said:

Let it start, very simply, by building our war industry. Europe must regain its sovereignty in arms, cannon, warplanes, the full gamut of weapons, materials and technology. It should no longer depend on the Americans. And it must give itself the means to do so. ... For the war effort, we must watch carefully over the unity of the nation.

Workers and youth cannot defend their social rights through national unity with warmongering governments that rule against the people. The strongest warnings must be made regarding the social promises in the NPF program. Workers can fight for these demands only by opposing imperialist war—including by opposing the militarist policies of any government that the NPF might form.

### **Middle class identity politics and the endorsement of the capitalist police state**

A critical element of the official redefinition of “left” politics in the post-Soviet era has been to redefine it away from class towards an exclusive focus on racial and gender issues. Much of the NPF program is devoted to providing funding for bureaucracies that the capitalist state supports in the name of opposing racial or gender prejudices. Not coincidentally, a considerable portion of the NPF's membership is employed in these or in the trade union bureaucracies.

The NPF program calls on the French state to establish a “Commissariat for Equality armed with an Observatory of Discriminations” to “sanction authors of racist, Islamophobic and anti-Semitic comments or acts.” It further proposes an “organic law to struggle against sexist and sexual violence that will raise the budget to 2.6 billion euros.”

It also demands more positions in the corporate apparatus for union bureaucrats, calling to “Make workers real actors of economic life, by reserving at least one third of the seats on works councils for them,” that is, for the union officials who sit on the works councils.

These proposals shed light on a critical reality of French and European politics: the ruling class spends billions on what it presents as “left” politics. The precise amount it devotes to paying off various bureaucrats is a state secret as carefully guarded as the flight paths and explosive yields of France's nuclear missiles. But it runs into the billions. In 2012, the leaked Perruchot report on union financing revealed that over 90 percent of the unions' roughly €4 billion budget came from state and corporate subsidies, as their dues base had collapsed over decades of betrayals.

The NPF program presents its demands for state financing as part of a struggle for democracy within the existing capitalist institutions. It proposes “To organize an Estates-General on public liberties,” and “To defend and reinforce trade unions and non-governmental organizations.” It criticizes police violence, calling to “ban rubber bullets and mutilating grenades and dismantle the BRAV-M” police motorcycle assault squads infamous for their brutality against protesters, including in trade union protests.

In the final analysis, however, the middle class layer that serves as the NPF's main social base does not fundamentally oppose the police state.

This finds expression in the NPF program's remarkable call to strengthen the police machine. It advocates “the maintenance of all military police units and increasing the staff of the investigative, technical and scientific police and of the intelligence services.”

As the ruling class prepares to escalate war abroad and class war at home against the will of the people, the strongest warnings must be made on the NPF's anti-Marxist politics. The police commissariats and the racial and gender commissariats staffed by the pseudo-left are ultimately funded by the same ruling class. They both suppress, each in their own fashion, working class opposition to imperialist war and capitalism.

The NPF's anti-far-right pretenses can easily and rapidly vanish: an official who criticizes anti-Muslim prejudices during an election campaign today may tomorrow demand drastic punishment of statements of solidarity with Gaza, claiming they are “antisemitic.”

### **The New Popular Front supports capitalism**

The NPF program calls, to be sure, to “Abolish the privileges of the billionaires.” It briefly raises the role obscene social inequality plays in the growth of neo-fascism, as billionaires like Vincent Bolloré build pro-far-right media empires. It proposes to “Strictly limit the concentration of media and cultural industries in the hands of a few owners and exclude from public subsidies media outlets convicted of inciting hatred or threatening the dignity of persons.”

However, its perspective is not to mobilize the working class in struggle against the far-right and against war, or to abolish the grotesque levels of social inequality under capitalism, where eight individuals own more wealth than half of humanity. It advances a program for a capitalist government it could form under Macron. Indeed, it proposes a few tax reforms: “Increase the progressiveness of income tax to 14 levels”, “Re-establish the Tax on Wealth (ISF),” and “Suppress ineffective tax havens.”

But the privileges of the billionaires cannot be abolished simply by closing a few of their best known tax loopholes. The existence of conditions in which a single individual can come to hold over a billion euros, like the threat of far-right rule and global war, reveals that the entire social order is utterly bankrupt. The grotesque inequality created by these fortunes exposes the reactionary nature of the capitalist appropriation of profits by major corporations exploiting masses of workers internationally.

The only progressive answer is the expropriation of the capitalists by the workers in a socialist revolution, which the NPF rejects.

The NPF's support for the capitalist class was mostly clearly laid out twelve years ago by its current candidate in Corrèze, former PS President François Hollande. Speaking to an audience of French bankers in London who were financing his bid for the presidency, Hollande told them:

Today there are no more communists in France. The left liberalized the economy and opened markets to finance and privatization. There is nothing to fear.

In office, Hollande launched a war in Mali, provoked mass protests by deporting Roma children from France, and savagely repressed protests against his labor law facilitating mass sackings. He played a major role promoting neo-fascism and establishing the French police state. After terrorist attacks in Paris in 2015, he invited RN leader Marine Le Pen to the Elysée Presidential Palace and imposed a two-year state of emergency

suspending democratic rights.

Hollande can only run for office today due to the role of Mélenchon in forming the NFP to promote the PS. Hollande, who privately mocks the large sections of the French people that cannot afford the exorbitant costs of dental care as the “toothless ones,” was so widely hated that in 2017 he did not dare run for a second term, but backed Macron. The rallying of Mélenchon and the Pabloite NPA to such a naked defender of capitalism as Hollande will predictably produce disaster for the workers.

### **Against the New Popular Front, build the Trotskyist movement!**

The central task posed to the working class is how to overcome the obstacle posed by Stalinism and the various descendants of renegades from Trotskyism to a struggle against imperialist war, neo-fascism and capitalism. The NFP program marks a new stage in the embrace of capitalism by the French Stalinists and all the middle-class descendants of forces that broke with the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), the leadership of the world Trotskyist movement, to ally with Stalinism and social-democracy.

The Pabloite NPA, whose political ancestors rejected Trotskyism and split with the ICFI in 1953 to seek alliances with Stalinism and bourgeois nationalism, have taken their anti-Trotskyist politics to its logical conclusion. The NPA’s name proclaims it to be “anti-capitalist,” and capitalist media constantly and fraudulently promote it as a “Trotskyist” party. But it has joined the NFP, an alliance led by the bourgeois PS to form a capitalist government under Macron, the “president of the rich.”

Mélenchon began his career in Pierre Lambert’s *Organisation communiste internationaliste* (OCI), which from 1953 to 1971 had been the ICFI’s French section. But he joined the OCI shortly after it split with the ICFI in 1971 to support the “Union of the Left” between the newly-founded PS and the PCF and its program for a capitalist “popular government.” Joining the PS in 1976, he ultimately became a minister in the 1997-2002 PS-led “Plural Left” government.

The 2002 election crisis exposed the bankruptcy of this orientation. Millions of workers protested as the presidential election turned into a run-off between right-wing candidate Jacques Chirac and the neo-fascist Jean-Marie Le Pen, due to the collapse in the PS vote among workers disgusted with its policies of austerity and war. The PS, the PCF and the Pabloite LCR, the predecessor of the NPA, all responded by endorsing Chirac as a defender of democracy against Le Pen. They in effect ceded to the far right the mantle of opposition to the political establishment.

The ICFI issued a call titled “No to Chirac and Le Pen! For a working class boycott of the French election.” It urged:

every organization seeking to defend the working class to campaign actively for a boycott of the May 5 presidential vote. No political support to either Le Pen or Chirac! Mobilize French working people and youth against this false and anti-democratic “choice.” ...

Why a boycott? Because it is necessary to deny any legitimacy to this fraudulent election; because it is necessary to establish an independent political line for the working class; because an active and aggressive boycott would create the best conditions for the political struggles that will arise in the aftermath of the elections. ...

It would serve to politically educate the masses, and especially the young people who have been set into motion by the shock of Le Pen’s success in the first round.

These new forces must learn important political lessons. They

must learn to see through the lies of the whole bourgeois political establishment—the governmental right and governmental left, as well as the media—who claim that a vote for Chirac represents the defense of democracy, the salvation of France’s “honor,” the creation of an “anti-fascist front,” and so on.

Mélenchon rejected a struggle to independently mobilize the working class against neo-fascism and war, though he ultimately left the PS in 2009. He did so based on an overt rejection of socialism to instead embrace the populism of “post-Marxist” academic Chantal Mouffe. In his 2014 book *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 “peoples’ revolution,” which “is not the old socialist revolution.”

Granted access to mass media for his criticisms of Hollande and Macron, he won nearly 8 million votes in the 2022 presidential elections. However, he declined to appeal to mobilize his voters, mostly in working class areas of the major cities, in struggle against Macron’s illegitimate pension cuts, the Gaza genocide, or anything else. Proclaiming in 2022 his willingness to serve as prime minister under either Macron or a neo-fascist president, he is a conscious opponent of socialism.

The *Parti de l’égalité socialiste* (PES), the French section of the ICFI founded in 2016, rejects the anti-Marxist politics and theoretical foundations of the NFP. It fights to alert workers to the vast and growing dangers of war and fascistic rule facing the French and international working class. However, it bases itself on historically grounded revolutionary optimism in the revolutionary role of the working class.

The war offensive of the imperialist powers will encounter deep and mounting opposition in the international working class, a class of billions of people that has vastly expanded over decades of economic globalization. The “yellow vest” protests of 2018-2019 in France, organized on social media, highlighted the potential for workers to struggle independently of the national bureaucracies. Independent rank-and-file organizations of the working class can and must emerge to build an international movement against imperialist war and dictatorship.

Such a struggle above all needs a Marxist historical perspective and political leadership. The PES bases its struggle for socialism on the ICFI’s unbroken defense of the continuity of Trotskyism and the October revolution against Pabloism, the pseudo-left and the NFP. It is the Trotskyist opposition that must be built to the New Popular Front, the threat of far-right dictatorship and imperialist war.



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