

Why is Mélenchon silent on Macron's secret talks with French neo-fascists?

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15 July 2024

In the recent legislative elections, millions in France voted for candidates of Jean-Luc Mélenchon's New Popular Front (NFP) alliance, or candidates of President Emmanuel Macron's party backed by the NFP, to prevent a neo-fascist electoral victory. Since these elections have led to a hung parliament, it has become evident that the NFP's alliance with Macron betrayed the aspirations of workers and youth.

The NFP came in first in the elections, but Macron refuses to name Mélenchon prime minister. Instead, as the daily *Libération* reported, Macron government officials are holding secret talks with the neo-fascist National Rally (RN) on the government crisis. Macron himself went to the NATO summit in Washington to discuss military escalation and plans for missile strikes on Russian cities, financed by austerity measures against the workers such as last year's pension cuts.

Mélenchon has kept a deafening silence on Macron's secret talks with the RN. Instead of attacking Macron's collaboration with the RN on the policies of war and austerity overwhelmingly rejected by the French people, he is doubling down on his alliance with Macron. He is not calling to mobilize workers and youth in protests and strikes against war and pension cuts, but blocking a movement in the working class against both Macron and the RN.

An examination of Mélenchon's speech on Friday night titled "The Political Moment" makes clear why he is remaining silent on Macron's ties to the RN. Attacking Macron's ties to the RN would explode Mélenchon's strategy of allying with Macron, supposedly to stop the far right, even as Macron calls to send troops to Ukraine for war with Russia and imposes a police-state regime at home.

On Friday night, Mélenchon defended the recent rebranding of his middle class populist France Unbowed (LFI) party's New Popular Union alliance with the big-business Socialist Party (PS) and the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF) as the NFP. He claimed his proposal for the NFP stunned the PS and the PCF into suddenly taking action against the far-right danger:

"They were surprised and stunned when, once the New Popular Union was dead, the New Popular Front suddenly emerged. I won't go into the details, they are all fresh in your mind. ... We said that nothing would be too dear to us, because we knew that if we reconstituted the Union, at whatever the price, it would be the fastest path to undo what Macron was trying to do, telling ourselves that what he was doing posed the enormous risk of it ending by a far-right victory."

Mélenchon's presentation of the NFP as a determined opponent of the far right is a political lie. If he intended to fight the far right, he would denounce Macron's secret talks with the RN and use them to mobilize working class opposition to Macron. But he does the opposite. Maintaining a complicit silence, he is deepening his alliance with Macron's Ensemble coalition—a strategy that boosts the RN by allowing it to posture as the only opponent of Macron.

In his Friday night speech, Mélenchon hailed his strategy of withdrawing NFP candidates to support Ensemble candidates against the RN in the elections. He boasted that the NFP entered into this alliance with Macron with no "illusions" about Macron's anti-worker role, but happily withdrew its candidates and support Macron's candidates anyway. Mélenchon said:

"As we had no illusions, we could not lose them. This is why, only three percent behind, we placed 100 constituencies in the balance. There are comrades who did not like this story. Comrades had to have lots of courage to accept that the constituency in which the last time they barely missed victory by a whisker, the next time it is not them, it is someone else who in some sense comes in and 'takes the profits' of the work that has been done. But that is life, it is the law of combat."

If this is what Mélenchon calls "combat" against Macron and the RN, one must ask: What would capitulation look like? Mélenchon went on to give a remarkable admission of political bankruptcy when he turned to arguing why alliances with Macron were supposedly the only possible choice LFI and the NFP had. As the election began, he asserted, the New Popular Front "did not have the same capacities as the National Rally at that moment."

The NFP, Mélenchon argued, was so weakened by the PS' defense of the Gaza genocide and its defense of the union bureaucracies' betrayal of last year's mass strikes against pension cuts that it could do nothing else but ally with Macron. Euphemistically referring to reactionary PS attacks on LFI's statements of solidarity with Gaza as "disunity," Mélenchon said:

"We had the problems first of disunity, second of having lost battles. ... 91 percent of the population is against raising the retirement age to 64, and ultimately what happened? Nothing. Not only nothing happened in either house of parliament, the

National Assembly did not have time to vote because Article 49-3 was invoked [by Macron to impose the cuts without a parliamentary vote], and it carried.

In truth, in every language in the world, that is called a defeat. There was no explanation from the trade union organizations, no one said how or why we lost. ... On this issue, what people felt was resignation, they said: 'Listen, okay, we lose all the time but we still have to start all the time, anyway.' So that's very hard."

Such a confession confirms the warnings the *Parti de l'égalité socialiste* (PES) has made about Mélenchon's opportunist NFP alliance with the PS and the Stalinist General Confederation of Labor (CGT) bureaucracy. It is a trap for the workers. Mélenchon's remarks beg the question: If alliances with the PS and the Stalinist PCF and CGT bureaucracies weaken left-wing, working class opposition to Macron and the RN, why does Mélenchon support such alliances?

It must be said, first of all, that Mélenchon's argument for his alliance with Macron—that his NFP was too discredited to do anything else—is a fraud. In reality, the NFP received the votes of millions of workers and youth who saw no other way to register opposition to both Macron and Le Pen. This surge of left-wing sentiment that would have been higher, had LFI not worked over several years to subordinate workers and youth to alliances with the PS, PCF and now with Macron.

Undoubtedly, however, the betrayal of the pensions struggle by the bureaucracies created bitterness and confusion. But this also exposes the reactionary role Mélenchon himself played. LFI made no call to mobilize its millions of voters in a strike movement, but demanded instead that opposition be funneled through parliament. Mélenchon now effectively admits there was no viable parliamentary tactic to stop Macron's cuts—that this strategy was bankrupt. The reason Mélenchon still pursues it must be found in the NFP's class basis and political program.

The NFP is a coalition between the imperialist bourgeoisie behind the PS and affluent middle class academics and union bureaucrats in the PCF and LFI. The NFP's own election program called to send French troops to Ukraine and to strengthen French military police and intelligence agencies. It works to block mass working class opposition to Macron, imperialist war, police-state rule and the RN because it has limited, tactical differences with Macron.

It is a matter of public record that Mélenchon began his political career in Pierre Lambert's *Organisation communiste internationaliste* (OCI), shortly after the OCI broke with the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), the Trotskyist movement. The OCI backed the Union of the Left alliance between the PCF and the recently-founded, big-business Socialist Party (PS) of the former Nazi-collaborationist François Mitterrand. OCI members like Lionel Jospin and Mélenchon joined the PS and became ministers in pro-austerity PS governments.

Mélenchon's calls to build a "populist" movement echo the PS-PCF alliance's promises to build a "popular" government after they agreed to the Common Program in 1972. However, since this alliance took power in 1981 in France—abandoning the Common Program's promises of reforms in the 1982-3 "austerity turn"—and particularly since the 1991 Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union, the PCF's base in the working class has collapsed. The forces that remain today in the NFP are middle class movements consciously hostile to

Marxism.

This was apparent in Mélenchon's remarks on Friday night. Mocking those who spend time "comparing the works of Karl Marx and Leon Trotsky," Mélenchon insisted that he rejects building a Marxist vanguard in the working class:

"We believe that the actor of history is the people itself, which does not need to be injected with consciousness as a revolutionary vanguard would do, that does not need to be led. It needs to be enlightened. Sometimes it needs someone to get something started, and then it acts."

He continued by promoting the NFP's pro-war, pro-police program as a continuation of the 1972 Common Program of Mitterrand and the PCF:

"All the great actions that led the left to victory were always actions based on a program. Being as old as I am, I can tell you that the Common Program led to the victory of 1981... We will get together on what to do and that way, we arrive at a common program so plenty of people who have totally different ideas about Yugoslav or Chinese socialism, or no socialism at all, ultimately get together because they say, 'Yeah, okay, that looks good.'"

The crisis in France exposes Mélenchon's bankrupt arguments. Last year's pension struggle offers very sharp lessons that must be learned. To be "enlightened," the working class needs to build its own revolutionary vanguard in order to politically smash the efforts of counterrevolutionary organizations like the NFP to sabotage their struggles. This is especially urgent now that the NFP is blocking opposition to Macron's corrupt maneuvers with the RN as he prepares war with Russia.

Amid the shift to the left in the snap elections, the decisive question is preparing and mobilizing a movement in the working class in struggle against war, genocide in Gaza, and austerity and fascistic police-state rule at home. The essential precondition to such a movement is repudiating the bitter hostility towards socialism of the NFP. The essential issues facing the working class cannot be resolved in parliament, but only through class struggle. The only way to defeat the rise of neo-fascism and war is the building of an international, socialist anti-war movement in the working class.



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