

Mass protests oppose Macron's naming of far-right government in France

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Hundreds of thousands of people marched Saturday against President Emmanuel Macron's naming of Michel Barnier to head a right-wing government backed by the neo-fascist National Rally (RN). Tens of thousands marched in Paris, while thousands marched in dozens of cities across France. The marches were called by Jean-Luc Mélenchon's France Unbowed (LFI) party, the main force in the New Popular Front (NFP) coalition that won the July 7 elections.

WSWS reporters intervened in the protests, which reflected opposition among youth and workers to the forming of France's first national government to openly rely on far-right support since the Nazi-collaborationist Vichy regime. The Macron-Barnier government has laid out a fascistic program of escalating attacks on immigrants, austerity including further pension cuts, and support for NATO as it prepares to send troops to Ukraine against Russia and backs the Israeli genocide in Gaza.

Although the protesters were largely LFI sympathizers, they also criticized Mélenchon. He built the NFP alliance with social-democratic, Green and Stalinist forces, and then built an election alliance with Macron for the July 7 elections, claiming this would block the RN. This strategy proved completely false. After seven weeks of negotiations, including back-channel talks with the RN, Macron trampled upon the election results, refusing to name a NFP prime minister, and instead named a RN-backed government.

Jordi, a student in Paris, told the WSWS he was marching "to show that there is strong opposition in the people on certain issues. Macron's decision to choose this prime minister and the way he acted in recent months on the legislative elections, it's not something that we can be satisfied with, that corresponds to the climate, geopolitical and social emergencies we face in France."

Pointing to Palestinian flags held by marchers protesting the Israeli regime's genocide in Gaza, Jordi said, "We are

seeing patterns repeat themselves. There are things we can compare to the Vichy regime, motifs that can recall the years before World War II, ideas that are nationalist, far right, that reject those who are different."

Romand and Jasmine, also both students, spoke of anger with Macron and their concerns about the NFP. Romand said, "Macron picked a right-wing prime minister whose ideas are pretty close to the far right, whereas during the legislative elections, he pretended to be participating in a democratic front to stop the neo-fascists. So, in my view, this is the worst possible hypocrisy on Macron's part."

Asked if one can fight fascism, as Mélenchon proposed, in an alliance with Macron and the big business Socialist Party (PS), Romand replied: "That's a very serious question. Barnier has the same program as [RN] leader Marine Le Pen. Yes, there are clearly ideas that come from Marine Le Pen."

Jasmine said, "About the NFP, I was really very happy when they managed to get together, to be united. ... So after [the NFP won] the elections, people like me were very happy. And now, I think we can say the disillusionment is really big."

Edith, retired teacher and former member of the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF), denounced Macron as "totally corrupt, depraved." She added that she does not support the NFP's policy of withdrawing its candidates to back those of Macron's party, supposedly to stop the RN from holding power. Mélenchon and the NFP helped get the parliamentarians elected whose votes now keep a RN-backed government in power.

She said, "I was not at all in agreement with that, that's why now I feel uncomfortable. Even if my political family is LFI, there are things that I did not like. I was not for a democratic front [against the RN], and indeed, now we see we are at an impasse. The candidates we presented should have been there up to the end. We should not be surprised now that it's coming back and hitting us in the

nose.”

Edith admitted that the union bureaucracies affiliated to the NFP played a central role in strangling mass protests against Macron’s illegitimate pension cuts last year. She said, “I agree with you, the trade unions were not up to the task. Two protests, three protests, even if millions of people are in the streets that it will be enough. ... The trade union officials who have the top positions are in some sense part of the establishment.”

Asked by the WSWS about the NFP program’s endorsement of Macron’s massively unpopular call to send troops to join the Ukrainian regime’s war with Russia, Edith said that France “voted money for Ukraine, but we never should have done that. We should have been much more firm. The Ukrainians did everything, with the support of the Americans, to destabilize the region. ... The left should have been much more firm, it was silent and did not openly state what forces were active.”

Edith’s remarks point to disillusionment among workers and youth with Mélenchon and his entire pseudo-left periphery of middle class parties and union bureaucracies. They proved hostile to mobilizing the millions of workers who voted for them against policies—war with Russia, genocide in Gaza abroad, and pension cuts at home—that are opposed by nine out of ten people in France. Throughout the summer, as Macron plotted how to overturn the election, Mélenchon did not once appeal to workers supporting him to strike.

Two fundamentally different perspectives is how workers and youth can overcome the obstacle posed by the bankruptcy of Mélenchon and his political periphery.

The emergence of a police state led by Macron and the RN, enabled by Mélenchon, reveals the impossibility of a defense of democracy on a capitalist basis. The defense of fundamental social and democratic rights requires a struggle for socialism, mobilizing the working class in struggle against imperialist war, genocide and capitalism. Such a struggle is by necessity international, requiring united, revolutionary struggle by workers in France and other countries.

Edith, in line with the history and perspectives of the PCF, said she is skeptical of internationalism; instead, disillusioned with Mélenchon, she has some sympathies for Florian Philippot, a former top aide of RN leader Marine Le Pen.

“So it’s true that I’m still close to LFI, but I’ve also attended several protests led by Philippot,” Edith said. She said she supports some of Philippot’s views because she believes Mélenchon appeals to immigrant, but not to

native-born workers. To be successful, she said, Mélenchon “would have needed to speak both to immigrants who live in France but also to the mood in favor of sovereignty, so to speak.”

Several protesters pointed to the political challenges posed by the emergence of such neo-fascist influences among workers disillusioned with the political betrayals of Mélenchon and the PS.

Anas, a student, told the WSWS: “The naming of a right-wing prime minister really pushed me to go into the streets. What is happening is ridiculous. ... Frankly, for my part, I have doubts about the New Popular Front. The NFP, okay, but there is the PS, there is part of the Greens. And the PS, we know very well how they go back on their word. ... The PS has nothing more in the working class, because the PS is a divisive, bourgeois party. They are very good at dirty deals.”

The RN, Anas said, for its part proposes to workers “a racial pact, that is to say, to unite under the flag of the nation, under a French banner. ... In fact, the problem is that the workers must play a role. And I am not saying that all workers vote for the RN. But we will have to change something.”

Workers and youth must irreconcilably oppose the RN and Macron, on the one hand, but also their pseudo-left enablers like Mélenchon. The basis of a struggle for socialism and workers power against Mélenchon is the defense of Trotskyism by the International Committee of the Fourth International, represented in France by the *Parti de l’égalité socialiste*.



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