

As French government and debt crises mount, Mélenchon denies there is a capitalist crisis

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The French government is set to fall Monday, amid bitter divisions in the National Assembly. Across Europe, the ruling class wants savage social cuts in order to finance surging military spending and sovereign debts. But in France's hung parliament, no opposition party dares back the austerity policy of President Emmanuel Macron's unpopular minority government, meanwhile the bourgeois media openly fear France is ungovernable.

This crisis of rule, rooted in the failure of capitalism, is exposing Jean-Luc Mélenchon, whose France Unbowed (LFI) party leads the New Popular Front (NFP). Irreconcilable class conflict is emerging. Amid the NATO-Russia war in Ukraine and the Gaza genocide, the capitalist oligarchy plans to slash social spending and impoverish the workers in order to divert hundreds of billions of euros to the war machine and the banks. Workers across Europe reject this policy.

Mélenchon, however, blames the entire crisis on just two men, Macron and Prime Minister François Bayrou. They are traitorously inventing a crisis out of spite, he asserts, and everything will be resolved in France if only the National Assembly can organize their removal. In his speech this week to LFI's summer school, Mélenchon said:

Why are they traitors? Because there is no financial crisis on the horizon. It is not true, but if you as president or prime minister keep repeating that there is a crisis, you finally create a mood of catastrophe. And that is what they are doing. Why? To obtain the intervention of the financial markets in French politics just as before in Greece, as in Italy, like everywhere. That is, the ratings agencies change your rating, interest rates rise, and you are asphyxiated. But we are 1,000 kilometers from such a situation. ... Our goal is for [Macron] to go away and to have snap presidential elections. Anything else would simply prolong the system's agony. The French people has a right to decide, as a great question is posed on its

identity, its organization, the course it chooses to take.

Mélenchon's claim there is no financial crisis is false. France's debt is 114 percent of its Gross Domestic Product, the euro zone's collective sovereign debt is 91 percent of its GDP. France is hemorrhaging hundreds of billions of euros each year as the ruling class ruins the country—amassing trillions of euros in wealth and demanding tens of billions more be spent to prepare “high-intensity war.”

As conflicts mount among the world powers and the banks worry about a crisis of global debt markets, the risk of a speculative attack on French debt, bankrupting France as happened to Greece in 2009, is real. It is not “1,000 kilometers away,” but actively discussed in the political establishment.

A lending strike by financial markets—recalling the “wall of money” that speculators directed against France's 1936-1938 Popular Front government, halting its adoption of social reforms—would confront the working class with revolutionary tasks. It would have to expropriate the fortunes of the capitalist oligarchy in order to fund social needs, and form a workers' government to take power out of the oligarchy's hands and stop the war escalation.

Mélenchon, however, is silent on the failure of capitalism, the struggle against imperialist war, and the need to expropriate the oligarchy.

While he flirts with the admission that France faces a revolutionary crisis, he proposes only reforms within the existing order. “There is something of 1788 in what we are living,” he admits, referring to the budget crisis of the French feudal monarchy that triggered the 1789 revolution. Pointing to the debate between King Louis XVI's finance ministers, Jacques Necker and Charles-Alexandre Calonne, Mélenchon argues that today the choice again is between free trade or state intervention in the economy on the basis of the existing social order:

In 1788 and the beginning of 1789, there was an incredible debate between Turgot [N.B. in reality, Charles-Alexandre Calonne, a follower of Jacques Turgot, who had died in 1781] and Necker. I will not tell the full story, but Turgot was for free-market economics and Necker for state intervention, allowing for variations in history. So that must remind you of someone. And finally, Louis who is handsome but not very smart puts in first Necker, then Turgot and then Necker again, and finally no one knows what is happening ...

We must decide. Will it be free trade or ecological planning that gives the perspective for social and ecological growth?

Mélenchon's own example speaks against him. If we are in 1788, then there is an intractable socio-economic crisis that cannot be resolved just by replacing a few officials at the top. The choice is not between "state-interventionists" and "free-marketeers" today, any more than it was in 1788 between Necker and Calonne. In the revolutionary crisis that broke out in 1789, the choice proved to be between Louis XVI and the Jacobins, who led the revolutionary overthrow of feudalism and the monarchy.

Mélenchon, however, has long insisted that no revolutionary leadership should be built, and that socialist revolution is off the agenda. For over a decade, he has called for a "citizens revolution" purely inside France's national borders, involving "the people" and not the working class, and taking place only via the ballot box. Thus, in his speech to the LFI summer school, Mélenchon declared:

The art of politics as an art of achievement, the art of strategic struggle as a science of movement consist in helping things crystallize. That is why we do not believe that we are a revolutionary leadership. We have given ourselves an objective by analyzing how citizens revolutions are constructed, and as we have understood all their stages, we say our role is to help each stage to install itself and move on to the next.

This vague, pompous rhetoric—taking no position on NATO imperialist wars, how to stop the Gaza genocide, or what Mélenchon wants workers to do—is a political trap.

If the ruling elite ousts Macron to place LFI in power, Mélenchon will ultimately capitulate to the banks. Of that, there can be no question. Indeed, there is already a long

track record. In Greece, anger at EU austerity led to the election in 2015 of SYRIZA, an affiliate of the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF) in Mélenchon's NFP. But amid speculation against Greek debt, SYRIZA betrayed its election promises, imposing billions of euros in new austerity measures against Greek workers.

Mélenchon's history, especially his role in the 1981-1995 Socialist Party (PS) presidency of François Mitterrand, must be taken as a warning. He began political life in Pierre Lambert's *Organisation communiste internationaliste* (OCI), which in 1971 had broken with the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), the leadership of the world Trotskyist movement, to ally with the PS on a national perspective. It backed the PS-PCF alliance, which promised "popular government" and left-wing reforms like those of the 1936 Popular Front.

Elected in 1981 amid a wave of popular enthusiasm, Mitterrand launched in 1982 an "austerity turn" as French trade and budget deficits rose. This set the stage for four decades of social attacks on the working class. With his calls for "citizens revolution" and a New Popular Front with what remains of the PS and PCF, he is only defending this same anti-Trotskyist orientation, 45 years later, to tie the working class to capitalism amid its mortal crisis.

The *Parti de l'égalité socialiste* (PES), the French section of the ICFI, explains that an objectively revolutionary crisis is emerging, requiring a working class struggle for socialist revolution. The PES calls to form rank-and-file committees in France and across Europe, to liberate workers struggles from the diktat of union bureaucracies and coordinate the necessarily international struggle against imperialist war, genocide and the capitalist oligarchy. Against the failure of capitalist Europe, it advances the perspective of the United Socialist States of Europe.



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