

Build rank-and-file committees to wage struggle against Macron and war—a reply to Mélenchon

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The fall of the French government amid a historic budget crisis and a first mass protest organized on social media on September 10 have revealed the crisis of capitalist rule. As the NATO powers escalate spending on re-militarization and war hysteria against Russia, France and other European countries are teetering on the edge of state bankruptcy. The great question is how the working class can intervene to stop massive social attacks on the population and further escalation of the war.

The crisis is also exposing the mechanisms the political establishment uses to demobilize working class opposition—above all, in France, Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s Unsubmissive France (LFI) party. In his blog post on the September 10 protest, titled “1000 cuts open a breach,” Mélenchon asserts that issuing a few calls for the removal of France’s widely hated president, Emmanuel Macron, is all that needs to be done. A citizens’ revolution, he claims, will thereupon spontaneously unfold:

It is enough for us to let the situation ripen. Two governments have already fallen, proving the level of destabilization of the higher ups. With a good plan of action, we simply gave a push to get there. The result was totally out of proportion with the means we deployed. ...

It is useless to tire oneself out trying to do more. [The higher-ups] are blinding themselves and thus showing themselves incapable to deal with the revolt that is coming. The citizens revolution ripening in people’s minds is closer to an elemental force of nature than to any sort of plot imagined by old bourgeois trembling in front of their televisions.

This is a thoroughly irresponsible, indeed reactionary attempt to lull workers to sleep. An elemental explosion of mass political anger is approaching, but the working class must prepare itself for the revolutionary challenges this will pose.

The bourgeois counterrevolution will fight ruthlessly, using not only the riot police, but the power of the banks and, above all, the demobilizing role of the union bureaucracies tied to LFI.

These bureaucracies’ role was clearly illustrated in the 2023 struggle against Macron’s massively unpopular pension cuts. Millions of people went on strike and riots erupted across France, yet the the union tops wore down the protests and shut down strikes after Macron promulgated his cuts as law. Workers must be warned: As the union bureaucracies resume their “conclave” with incoming Prime Minister Sébastien Lecornu, they are moving to play the same role again.

The working class needs to build its own independent organizations of struggle, rank-and-file committees in workplaces, schools and working class neighborhoods, to take back control of its struggles from the bureaucracies. The crisis of capitalist rule in France and across Europe cannot be resolved by a “citizens revolution” unfolding at the ballot box inside France, as LFI proposes. Only a socialist revolution unfolding across Europe and internationally, expropriating the capitalist oligarchy, can prevent a collapse in living standards and further war escalation.

While Mélenchon again mocks the “supposed debt crisis” in his blog post, there is in reality a mortal crisis of capitalism in Europe. Sovereign debt is 114 percent of GDP in France, 150 percent in Italy, 104 percent in Spain, 102 percent in Britain. Germany’s plan to spend €1 trillion on re-militarization could boost its debt to 90 percent of GDP. Across Europe, countries are spending hundreds of billions of euros on servicing their debts to the banks, and are calling to spend hundreds of billions on boosting their armed forces to prepare for war with Russia.

The French budget crisis starkly illustrates the issues poses to workers across Europe. On tax revenues of €330 billion, the French state is spending €100 billion servicing its mounting debts, €50 billion on the military and pledging to raise its military spending a further €100 billion to reach 5 percent of GDP. If the bourgeoisie is allowed to press forward with its plans for war and massive payoffs to the banks, it will also defund and destroy the social welfare state. A the statement of the *Parti de l’égalité socialiste* (PES) explained,

Two stark alternatives are presented. Either the capitalist oligarchy builds a fascistic dictatorship to crush the working class, or the working class wages a revolutionary struggle on a socialist program to expropriate the oligarchs. This requires breaking through the straitjacket of the union bureaucracies and building genuine, rank-and-file organizations dedicated to prosecuting the class struggle.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) calls for the transfer of power from the trade union bureaucracies to the workers in all factories and workplaces. Such new forms of class organization, uniting workers in France and throughout Europe, are necessary to organize resistance to and defeat the corporate-financial oligarchy's program of fascism, genocide and war.

Mélenchon's call for "citizens revolution" and to simply let the situation "ripen" is an attempt to consolidate the influence of the bureaucracies and block such a mobilization of the working class, by denigrating the struggle for socialism and workers' power. In his blog post, he chides his allies in the Stalinist-led General Confederation of Labor (CGT) bureaucracy for their denunciation of the mass "yellow vest" protests against social inequality.

Mélenchon prods the union bureaucracies to take a verbally friendly posture towards the protests, so as to cover up their meetings with Lecornu to plan attacks on pensions and to limit working class opposition to trade union sellouts. The September 10 day of action, he writes

does not resolve all the problems posed by the separation maintained between trade union action and mass popular action. The rapid involvement of Solidaires in the the September 10 day of action, reinforced by several of the decisive federations of the CGT alongside many local and regional trade union bodies has obviously reduced the fracture that emerged during the yellow vest episode. ...

This time, the CGT supported September 10. But by calling for strikes on September 18, it set up a competition [between mobilizations on September 10 and September 18] that weakened the convergence of struggles. Fortunately, this did not prevent the success of September 10 or the mass character of the protests. Everyone should meditate on this fact.

In fact, the lesson that workers have to draw from the union bureaucracies' collusion with Lecornu and their hostility to revolution is the need for an uncompromising struggle to build

independent organizations of struggle, completely outside of the existing political system. The IWA-RFC must be built across Europe and beyond.

Mélenchon cynically claims that he supports the self-organization of working people, but only to then make clear that LFI will play no part in achieving it. Indeed, he seeks to reassure his readers that his party poses no revolutionary threat. Calling for a "spontaneous strategy," he indicates that he calls for "self-organization" because LFI is washing its hands of the fight for the building of rank-and-file organizations of struggle, and instead defending good order and tranquility:

"Self-organization, as everyone knows, is the path privileged in LFI's vision of mass action. On their side, the fascists have meetings in the woods and train in unpunished bands to hunt blacks and Arabs ... The 500 members of LFI's security detail have no comparable plan. They are exclusively destined to protecting the tranquility of our meetings and the personal security of our spokespeople."

But the self-organization of the working class—that is, building rank-and-file organizations of struggle completely outside the existing political system—must be fought for. Through its leader, LFI is declaring that it will not carry out this struggle. His statement also describes the policy of countless smaller petty-bourgeois organizations that endorsed Mélenchon's New Popular Front alliance with the social-democrats and Stalinists. All of these organizations claim they must put pressure on the union bureaucracies to provide them with a "battle plan."

The most dedicated and self-sacrificing elements among workers and youth must therefore strike out on an independent path and fight for the building of the International Workers Alliance of Rank and File Committees more broadly in the working class. The political organization that must be built in France to provide political leadership to such a struggle is not LFI, but the PES.



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