

French budget crisis exposes bankruptcy of New Popular Front

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Macron's installation of a second government under Sébastien Lecornu in October, together with the frenzied budget negotiations now unfolding in the National Assembly, has laid bare the anti-democratic role of Jean-Luc Mélenchon's New Popular Front (NFP - Nouveau Front Populaire). By blocking the development of the class struggle, the NFP has enabled Macron to continue ruling against the people.

While negotiations are still ongoing, the basic outlines of the 2026 budget are already clear. So far, the Assembly has:

- Rejected the Zucman tax, which would have imposed a mere 2 percent levy on the wealth of the super-rich;

- Approved a €64 billion military budget—double what it was when Macron first came to power—while French chief of staff General Fabien Mandon openly predicts a “shock” military confrontation with Russia within four years, demanding even more military spending;

- Proposed to extract tens of billions from workers through a pension freeze and draconian austerity targeting Social Security, including doubling medical co-pays and taxing doctors in ways that could trigger an upward spiral of doctors' fees.

At the start of the autumn, one million people demonstrated, and a broad majority of the French population wanted Macron's resignation and a profound political transformation. The Lecornu-Macron agenda—refusal to tax the financial aristocracy, calls to send troops to Ukraine, and austerity continuing the 2023 pension reform—is massively rejected. How, then, does France find itself again saddled with a government bent on imposing precisely these policies?

The parliamentary mechanism was the Socialist Party (PS), a key component of the NFP, voting to sustain Lecornu's minority government. But the PS could only do so thanks to Mélenchon. When the PS collapsed to

less than 2 percent in the 2022 presidential elections, Mélenchon rescued it and its allies—the Stalinist PCF and the Greens—by offering them an alliance, first called NUPES and later NFP, which also incorporated the union bureaucracies. Instead of politically destroying the PS, a discredited party of French imperialism, Mélenchon shielded it.

He issued no call to mobilize the 8 million people who voted for him in 2022, leaving the union bureaucracies free to slow and then halt strikes against Macron. Mélenchon and the leadership of his party, France Unbowed (La France insoumise), thus worked to strangle the class struggle in France, even as mass strikes and protests against austerity, militarism, and the genocide in Gaza erupted in Italy, Spain, Belgium, and the United States.

Events have exposed the political lies that Mélenchon defends the people's interests or that he is trying to lead a “citizen revolution.” Ninety-one percent of the French people reject pension cuts, and 89 percent of Western Europeans reject Macron's call to prepare to send European troops to Ukraine to fight Russia. Yet the French bourgeoisie continues these policies in defiance of public opinion thanks to the PS and union leaderships, who themselves depend on Mélenchon's support.

The Assembly, which Mélenchon proclaims as the center of his national “citizens revolution,” is functioning as a parliamentary dictatorship exercised by the capitalist aristocracy against the workers. As debt in many European countries soars beyond 100 percent of GDP, ruling circles are intensifying discussions on how to impose a dictatorship and dismantle what remains of the “French social model” born of workers' struggles against the Nazi occupation.

The International Monetary Fund bluntly summarized

this perspective, asserting that a “discussion of the scale and sustainability of the European model seems inevitable.” It added, “If reforms and medium-term consolidation prove insufficient, more radical fiscal measures are conceivable: re-evaluating the scope of public services and other government functions. This could erode the social contract.”

If the capitalist aristocracy is preparing to repudiate the social contract, it is also working to prepare a dictatorship in order to crush the working-class opposition this will provoke. This underlies the legitimization of neo-fascism across Europe, but also of the illegal deployment of troops into US cities by America’s fascist president, Donald Trump. Formations like the NFP pose no serious obstacle to this march toward dictatorship.

Speaking to *Mediapart*, Mélenchon expressed satisfaction as to this situation, however, pointing to his parliamentary “results.” Citing the Assembly’s adoption of a tax on transnational corporations during budget talks, he said:

“This is the second time we have had central elements of LFI’s counter-budget adopted in the Assembly, even though it is a hung parliament. We are proving that our vision of parliamentarism is a constructive reality: last year, we already secured €26 billion with the tax on multinationals, as today. ... But will Lecornu respect the vote to tax transnational corporations?”

Mélenchon’s complacency is glaring. His last question underscores the very limited value of his parliamentary “successes,” while ignoring the budget’s impact on workers. The budget threatens not only military escalation—including open conflict with Russia—but also the immiseration of workers. Mélenchon went on to speculate about an alliance of LFI with the right to impose a Sixth Republic and oust Macron:

“We are advancing the solution to chaos by demanding his departure and with our offer of a Sixth Republic. Even on the right, there are reasonable people who talk about it. ... Macron must quickly be put out of harm’s way, because he will destroy everything and make a mess. Everyone sees he acts only for the ultra-rich. Better that the change of Republic take place in civil peace and through a democratic process.”

Mélenchon does not defend the people. He is working

to ensure “civil peace,” that is, to block the class struggle, keep Macron in power against the will of the people, and to adopt decisive elements of Macron’s policy with which the NFP agrees. Indeed, the NFP’s electoral program last year proposed to strengthen the police and intelligence services, and also to send French troops—disguised as “peacekeepers”—to Ukraine. This pact was drafted not only by the PS and union leaderships, but also the petty-bourgeois populists of LFI.

As strikes spread across Europe and “No Kings” protests shake Trump, it is time to draw the lessons of the recent political experience in France. Appeals to defend democracy through the parliamentary and union machinery of the capitalist state have failed. Defending democracy requires, as Marxists have always explained, the mobilization of the working class in a struggle for workers power and socialism.

For this, workers must build rank-and-file organizations of struggle, independent of the union apparatus tied to the NFP. The social gains now targeted by Macron were won through the resistance struggles of factory committees and workers’ militias such as the FTP against Vichy and Nazism. France is not, of course, militarily occupied as it was in the 1940s; however, only the construction of a new network of workers’ organizations, independent of the union bureaucracies, can overcome the political obstacle posed by the NFP to the working class.

To launch the fight to build such organizations, the working class needs a revolutionary Trotskyist vanguard, irreconcilably hostile to the opportunism and cowardice of the NFP. That vanguard is the Socialist Equality Party, French section of the International Committee of the Fourth International. Calling on workers in France to join the building of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, it appeals to all who support this perspective to join its ranks.



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