

A reply to a reader's comment on a WSWS article on Jean-Luc Mélenchon

By Alex Lantier
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The comment below was posted in reply to the WSWS article “French presidential candidate Mélenchon calls for bringing back the draft.” It is followed by a reply from Alex Lantier.

This article is filled with incorrect statements and false information. First of all, sorry for my English.

— He [Mélenchon] “wants to bring back the draft in order to prepare the French army for major wars abroad”

>>> Absolutely wrong: people will be able to choose between serving in the army, police, fire brigades, civilian safety. The point is not to prepare a generation to fight in wars. This is the role of the French Army.

—“He proposes to draft them into a ‘national guard,’ a unit initially proposed by the neo-fascist National Front (FN)”

>>> How can you be so wrong?: Garde Nationale

—“In fact, Mélenchon is preparing a militarist, nationalist, and anti-worker policy.”

>>> JLM wants diplomatic summits to prevent wars in Europe, with discussions about eastern borders that are threatened. He wants to leave NATO and forbid the “ballistic deployment” of American forces in Europe, an irresponsible threat to 75 percent of Russian military facilities, activating tensions in Europe that we do not want or need.

—“Mélenchon seeks to give a ‘radical’ cover to his pro-war policies”

>>> What pro-war policies are you even talking about? I’d be curious of any point you could find about this. This is the perfect opposite of his policies. Mélenchon is against a “European military” precisely because he is against WAR. He wants to prevent conflicts over Eastern European borders in order to avoid a large-scale conflict. He doesn’t want Europe to get involved in conflicts that could be provoked by insane American maneuvers in Europe and Asia, with their deployments.

—“This is only stirring up reactionary French nationalism”

>>> Do not confuse nationalism and will of independence and sovereignty. Do not confuse patriotism and nationalism.

—“Now that he is rising in the polls, Mélenchon is aligning himself with those like [Emmanuel] Macron who are supporting NATO’s threats against Moscow and laying the groundwork for a catastrophic world war against Russia”

>>> He wants to leave NATO and says the threats to Russia are terribly dangerous for the world, and will settle war.

I think you should really stop trying to write articles, this one is nonsense, full of unverified statements.

The reader presents two basic criticisms of the WSWS article, which cites French politician Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s call to reinstate the draft in order to warn of the danger of war and of Mélenchon’s role as a pro-war candidate.

First, our critic asserts that Mélenchon is against war. Second, to the WSWS criticisms of Mélenchon as a reactionary, he opposes ostensibly ‘radical’ demands listed on the inside pages of the former’s election program.

These criticisms raise key political and historical issues for the working class, but they are fundamentally wrong, and the WSWS assessment of Mélenchon is correct.

On the first point, Mélenchon is on record as a pro-war politician, whose criticisms of certain wars are based on his defense of French imperialist interests. He promoted the NATO war in Libya in 2011, as the WSWS documented at the time, echoing official lies that NATO’s was a humanitarian war aiding a democratic revolution. He unambiguously declared himself “in favor of the military operation in Libya,” stating: “We must break the tyrant to prevent the destruction of the revolution.”

He criticized the Syrian war after NATO’s 2014 putsch in Ukraine, as the US-German confrontation with Russia in both countries handed Berlin the chance to re-militarize and assert its hegemony across Europe—including against Paris. He then published a foul, nationalist book, *Bismarck’s Herring*, in 2015. It warned of German hegemony in Eastern Europe and cited statistics purporting to show that Germans, as a nationality, are fatter and less hard-working than the French. Now, he appears to be tacking back towards a more pro-Berlin and anti-Moscow position.

His pro-war positions are not accidental; they flow from his decades-long membership in and support for the Socialist Party (PS). Under PS founder President François Mitterrand, he briefly criticized the 1991 Gulf War in Iraq. This criticism was kept strictly within the limits of Mitterrand’s manipulation of anti-war sentiment in France, however, and was not intended to cross French imperialism’s ties to its US and European allies. When Mitterrand told him behind closed doors that it was time to call off his criticisms of the war, Mélenchon obeyed.

And today, if Mélenchon gave the army the power to conscript youth—to prepare for the period of ‘major wars’ foreseen by the leading presidential candidate, Emmanuel Macron, or the danger of ‘total war’ with Russia foreseen by President François

Hollande—what would he do? “It is strategy that commands, not the budget,” Mélenchon declares. That is to say, if army strategy commands it, untold billions of euros would be spent on sending the drafted youth to war.

Of course, as the reader points out, Mélenchon’s campaign claims the draft will allow youth to pick between the army, police, civilian security, etc. His program also contains a laundry list of promises like leaving NATO, increasing wages, cutting the retirement age, etc. To be blunt, such promises come from a long and reactionary tradition of empty demagoguery.

If Mélenchon’s program promises the people so much, why do 44 percent of manual workers plan to vote for Marine Le Pen of the neo-fascist FN? Why is the PS disintegrating? It is because workers have heard such promises time and again, each time the PS and its allies ran for office, since 1972. Every time they took power, these promises proved to be lies. The PS pursued pro-business, pro-war policies. And after austerity and the state of emergency under the current PS president, Hollande, workers are sick of this rhetoric.

The original version was the Common Program signed in 1972 by the then one-year-old PS and the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF). The purpose of this alliance was to give the PS—a party speaking for pro-imperialist sections of state officialdom and academia, including many whose origins went back to the Nazi-collaborationist Vichy regime—a false, socialist veneer. Since the PS was allied with the PCF, the leading French ally of the Soviet regime, was it not obvious that the PS had to be a socialist organization?

This was a historical falsehood. The PCF, which repeatedly betrayed revolutionary struggles in France like the 1968 general strike, represented not the continuity of the Russian Revolution of 1917, but Stalinism and nationalism. The false identification was based on the infamous lies of the Moscow Trials. Masses of workers had been told that Leon Trotsky and the Old Bolsheviks, the internationalist leaders of the 1917 Revolution whom Joseph Stalin then murdered, were counterrevolutionaries or fascist agents, while Stalin and his allies in the post-World War II PCF leadership were revolutionaries.

The Common Program’s promises of nationalizations, jobs, democratic rights and the building of socialism—but without a proletarian revolution—proved to be fraudulent as well. Not only did the PCF support the Stalinist bureaucracy’s dissolution of the Soviet Union and restoration of capitalism, but the PS unceremoniously abandoned its campaign promises shortly after coming to power. Since the ‘austerity turn’ Mitterrand began in 1982, a year after his election, the PS has proved itself over the decades to be a party of austerity, war and attacks on democratic rights.

Mélenchon himself joined the PS in 1976 after a brief membership in the *lambertiste* Internationalist Communist Organization (OCI), which had broken with Trotskyism and the International Committee of the Fourth International, based on the false, nationalist perspective that the PS-PCF alliance would create a workers government. He made a career as a PS senator and then minister, moving far to the right. However, he retained a gift for the demagoguery of 1970s French petty-bourgeois “left.”

This is why, even after he left the PS in 2009, he still issued programs full of promises in the style of the Common Program that no one in the political establishment, least of all Mélenchon himself, takes seriously. He infallibly aligns himself with the needs of French imperialism, however, after stimulating illusions in the PS with empty, superficial promises.

One example of this is the reader’s confused reference to Mélenchon’s support for a National Guard. The reader attaches a Wikipedia link implying this is a type of citizens municipal guard unit formed after the French Revolution of 1789. However, that National Guard was dissolved after 1871 and the massacre of the Paris Commune, whose National Guard unit was crushed by the French army. But that is not the character of the current National Guard. As the WSWS noted, it is a paramilitary security unit created last year by Hollande, and whose creation had been demanded by the FN.

Particularly after Mélenchon applauded his Greek ally, the Syriza government, which imposed European Union austerity on the workers and trampled their overwhelming vote against austerity in a referendum, there can be no doubt as to which class interests he defends. He is a capitalist politician, playing on historical falsehoods and appealing to nationalism to deceive and strangle working class opposition.

Thus, our critic defends Mélenchon’s nationalism and warns the WSWS, “Do not confuse patriotism and nationalism.” It then suggests that the WSWS should cease exposing Mélenchon.

The WSWS has no intention of abandoning its opposition to Mélenchon. It fights to build an alternative for the working class, the *Parti de l’égalité socialiste* in France and its sister parties internationally, by making clear the gulf separating Trotskyism from forces like Mélenchon. It encourages the reader to reconsider his own stated nationalist position, whether or not he calls it patriotism in order to make it seem less reactionary.

He is indifferent to Mélenchon’s public rejection of socialism and a politically independent role for the working class, or to his widely reported friendships with right-wing figures, such as journalist Eric Zemmour or political strategist Patrick Buisson, who defend the legacy of France’s pre-World War II nationalist far right. Yet this is a clear indication that Mélenchon is not fighting for left-wing politics after the collapse of the PS, but seeks to demoralize and divide the working class based on the poison of nationalism.

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Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>