

The fraud of Mélenchon's call for a Franco-Russian alliance against war

By Alex Lantier and Kumaran Ira
15 May 2018

Last week, as US President Donald Trump canceled the Iranian nuclear treaty and Israel repeatedly bombed Iranian forces deployed in Syria, Unsubmissive France (LFI) leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon took a three-day trip to Moscow. Criticizing Trump's threats against Iran, he called for an anti-American alliance between Paris and Moscow.

This is a reactionary, nationalist perspective that splits the working class. As strikes erupted among US teachers and French rail workers, last month's NATO missile strike on Syria provoked opposition among not only Russian and Middle Eastern workers, but US and European workers also. Yet Mélenchon called on French and Russian workers not to unite with their class brothers and sisters in opposition to war, but to focus on building new military alliances against them.

Mélenchon embraced the Kremlin, who with Iran has fought NATO-backed Islamist guerrillas in Syria. "I am absolutely against the US alliance, I want to leave NATO," he said before flying to Moscow. "Very great violence is being prepared between Iran, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, in this region, some of these countries have common borders with Russia, we should show the world is not black and white."

In Moscow, Mélenchon proclaimed his friendship with Russia, met with Russian military brass and legislators as well as French investors in Russia, and worked for an "anti-war" alliance including LFI and the Stalinist Left Front of Sergei Udaltsov. He joined the May 9 military parade commemorating the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany in 1945, wearing a tricolor sash with the French national colors. He told the media, "I have come here to undertake a militant act: to say, 'The Russians are our friends.'"

Mélenchon's calls for good relations with Russia did not apply to the United States or to Germany. Instead, he denounced the growing influence in Europe of Germany, where "after the annexation of East Germany, bad habits have returned."

The only way to fight the drive to war is to rally workers internationally against it, and Mélenchon's criticisms of US-led wars or German-led austerity policies, that ignore opposition to austerity and war among US and German workers, are reactionary. Uniting Paris and Moscow in an alliance against Washington or Berlin would have no progressive content at all. Like the 1891 Franco-Russian alliance, a key element of the inter-European rivalries that exploded into World War I in 1914, it would only intensify great-power conflicts that threaten to provoke new wars.

And while Mélenchon tries to make such criticisms of NATO appear radical, they merely echo the debates agitating broad layers of the ruling class. Sections of the European press, angry at Trump's cancellation of the Iran treaty, are asking if the trans-Atlantic alliance is dead. German Chancellor Angela Merkel has declared that Europeans would have to fight "for ourselves" in future, and Trump himself called NATO "obsolete."

Mélenchon's inflated rhetoric notwithstanding, his wooing of Udaltsov and the Kremlin is not a "militant act" to build an alliance to protect Iran from US-Israeli war threats, or to stop the great powers' drive to repartition the Middle East. Rather, it provides a "left" face for the cynical and cowardly policies of Paris and Moscow, which are both seeking an accommodation with Trump.

To discourage Iran from restarting its nuclear program, thus giving Trump a pretext to impose more economic sanctions against their interests, the European Union (EU) and Moscow have signaled that they would back Israeli strikes on Iranian forces in Syria. Before launching its attacks, Israel obtained statements by the EU powers backing Israeli "self-defense," and Israeli premier Benjamin Netanyahu went to Moscow for talks. Russia did not warn Iran of incoming Israeli strikes, making clear on which side the Kremlin stands.

These reactionary maneuvers drew no criticism from LFI or the Left Front. Instead, they appealed for an alliance with populist parties across Europe like Spain's Podemos, Portugal's Left Bloc, and Denmark's Red-Green Alliance (RGA). During Mélenchon's visit, the Left Front issued a statement, titled "Stop the New World War!" stimulating illusions that such a coalition of populist parties already holding high national and regional offices could suddenly turn to opposing war.

The statement began by condemning Trump's repudiation of the Iranian nuclear treaty. This is, it warned, "not only inhumane towards the Iranians, but it also hits the economic interests of Europe and Russia, it contradicts the principles of justice that 'world leaders' like to talk about ... All this reflects the rapid and uncontrolled growth of inter-imperialist contradictions and the general crisis of global capitalism. Capital once again pushes people to the meat grinder of fratricidal wars."

Lamenting that one cannot expect a "principled and tough stand against the unleashing of a new imperialist slaughter" from the Kremlin, the statement called instead for "the solidarity of peoples despite the heads of governments. However impossible it may

seem today, we must build a global anti-war movement, relying on solidarity between all progressive forces in all countries.”

This coalition of parties proposed by Udaltsov is a trap for workers and youth seeking to build an international movement against war. The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), which publishes the WSWS, is fighting to build an international, socialist anti-war movement in the working class. Udaltsov and Mélenchon, however, aim to subordinate workers and youth to pro-war parties that are longstanding fixtures of the political establishment.

The Western European parties in this proposed coalition are pro-imperialist parties of the affluent middle class, incorporating large Stalinist factions that supported the restoration of capitalism in the USSR, and that have a long record of supporting war. LFI is leading the planning in the French National Assembly for a return to the draft, euphemistically calling it “universal national service with a military component” to try to make it seem less objectionable.

Podemos and the RGA support the 2011 NATO war in Libya, which Mélenchon also endorsed. In one infamous article, leading RGA member Bertil Videt criticized opponents of that war as obsessed with “always being opposed to imperialist aggressions.” The RGA, on the other hand, is not. And Podemos made General José Rodríguez, the leader of the Spanish armed forces’ operations in the Libyan war, a leading member as it recruited widely in the Spanish officer corps.

As for Udaltsov, his main concern is to channel opposition in Russia in directions acceptable to the Russian political establishment. In a sign of his close ties to factions of the Russian state and ruling elite, the Left Front statement was reposted on the web site of the Moscow Echo radio station, a mouthpiece of the Russian liberal opposition owned by state energy firm Gazprom.

There is no serious perspective for developing opposition to war in Russia and Europe without examining the alternative to Stalinism advanced by Trotsky, and the ICFI’s Trotskyist critique of the Stalinist restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union in 1991. It is ever-clearer that the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union, against which Trotsky warned, did not only provoke an industrial collapse and social retrogression in Russia. It had disastrous geopolitical consequences far beyond the Soviet Union’s borders.

The collapse of the main military counterweight to NATO opened an era of escalating imperialist wars, starting with the US-led 1991 Gulf War against Iraq, that cost millions of lives and have turned over 60 million people into refugees. Repeated wars in Iraq, three decades of war in Afghanistan, and wars in Libya, Syria and Yemen shattered entire societies. And as Washington demands total surrender from Iran on its nuclear program, an even greater war is being prepared.

Now, a growing radicalization is proceeding in the working class internationally. The fight against war requires a return to the best revolutionary traditions of the Russian and European working class, whose highest expression was the seizure of power by the working class in the October Revolution a century ago, led by the Bolsheviks under Lenin and Trotsky. Mélenchon and Udaltsov are not proposing such a struggle, however, but consciously trying to

smother it by channeling opposition behind petty-bourgeois, pro-war parties.

Mélenchon in particular is both obsessed with passing himself off as a radical by speaking about Trotsky, and very aware of his own hostility to Trotsky’s politics. *Le Monde* reported the following scene during his tour in the military parade in Moscow: “Mélenchon was given a Soviet army medal. He said, ‘Thank you, sir,’ then caught himself and said, ‘Thank you, comrade, sir.’ Facing laughter all around, he added, ‘I began my career based on the ideas of the founder of the Red Army,’” that is to say, Trotsky.

This absurd flirtation with references to Trotsky is a fraud. Mélenchon came to politics just after the 1968 French general strike, joining the *Organisation communiste internationaliste* (OCI) as it broke with the ICFI and Trotskyism. Acting on the OCI’s bankrupt perspective of building up the big-business Socialist Party (PS), Mélenchon joined the PS in 1976; he had a long career as a PS senator, minister, and aide to PS President François Mitterrand.

Despite Mélenchon’s current flirtation with the Kremlin, French imperialism under the PS pursued a generally anti-Russian policy—backing the stationing of US missiles in Europe aimed at the Soviet Union, promoting the euro and the EU, and joining the 1991 Gulf War.

In Russia last week, Mélenchon recounted his trips to the Soviet Union and Russia as a leading bourgeois politician. “The first time was with Mitterrand, when we went to see (French astronaut) Jean-Loup Chrétien take off from Baikonur” in November 1988, he indicated. In the second, at a date Mélenchon claimed to forget but that apparently was after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, he met Gorbachev “to try to figure out what had happened.”

Such politicians’ military and diplomatic maneuvers will not rally humanity in solidarity against war, but work to block growing opposition among workers to capitalism and its drive to war.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>