

Mélenchon's Unsubmissive France opens summer school with overtures to right-wing parties

By Francis Dubois
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On August 23-26, Unsubmissive France (LFI), the movement led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon, held its summer school in Marseille. It brought together 3,000 people and was widely reported on in the press. Mélenchon stressed his ambition to bring together “all the oppositions” to French President Emmanuel Macron.

After Macron's election last year and the electoral collapse of the Socialist Party (PS), France's main social democratic party since the May-June 1968 general strike, Mélenchon's strategy has become clear. Amid growing social anger against policies of militarism and austerity across Europe, Mélenchon is trying to ensure that no genuinely socialist alternative will emerge to the left of Macron and the PS. He aims to build an “opposition” to Macron that is compatible with war, austerity, attacks on democratic rights, nationalism, and xenophobia.

In Marseille, Mélenchon presented himself as a “force for propositions” open to all alliances, including with the right wing: “On the right, too, there may be oppositions. Macron will find himself facing a barricade of a length that he had not dreamed of.”

LFI invited to Marseille representatives of the right-wing The Republicans (LR) party, the PS, the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF), the Génération.s party of former PS presidential candidate Benoît Hamon, members of Macron's own The Republic on the March (LRM), and the New Anticapitalist Party (NPA). Members of these parties led discussion groups on the army, the European Union (EU), pensions and the police. Mélenchon ultimately decided not to invite neo-fascist politicians, however.

LFI also announced its EU parliamentary election campaign for 2019, calling for it to be an “anti-Macron referendum.” For these elections, LFI has forged an alliance with other pseudo-left populist parties like Podemos in Spain, the Left Bloc in Portugal, and even Sinn Féin in Ireland. It did not mention Syriza, the model of all of these organizations, which is now in power and imposing austerity

on the Greek workers. However, he invited former members of Syriza including the former speaker of the Greek parliament, Zoé Konstantopoulou.

LFI proclaims that it is based not on a class but on the “people,” including the capitalist class and the affluent middle class, and that it wants not a socialist but a “citizens revolution.” Mélenchon supposedly chose the LFI candidates via a “lottery” and organized a “festive” march, without social or political demands, through the streets of Marseille on Friday.

LFI tries to present its political reorientation as new, but the regroupment it is proposing is not new at all. Rather, it is an even more right-wing version of the old, failed anti-worker and anti-Trotskyist political recipes. Having started out in Pierre Lambert's *Organisation communiste internationaliste* (OCI) after it broke with the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) in 1971, Mélenchon became a key operative in the PS-PCF Union of the Left led by François Mitterrand that was backed by various groups, like the OCI, that had broken with Trotskyism.

Mélenchon became a PS minister in the 1997-2002 PS-PCF-Green “Plural Left” government that ended in disgrace, when Prime Minister Lionel Jospin failed to reach the run-off in the 2002 presidential elections, coming in third behind LR candidate Jacques Chirac and neo-fascist Jean Marie Le Pen. LFI's predecessor, the Left Party (PG) founded by Mélenchon in 2009, allied with the Stalinists and elements from the NPA in the so-called Left Front.

Amid rising anger against Macron's austerity policies, LFI and Mélenchon are posing as the only viable opposition to the Macron government, while insisting on the need to develop links with explicitly right-wing forces.

In his speech to the summer school, Mélenchon laid out the nationalist outlook that pervades his policies. He devoted almost half his speech to questions of lifestyle and ecology, peppered with ahistoric platitudes about humanity in

general: “We must all identify with the symbol of water... We defend the human race.”

All his criticisms of Macron’s social austerity policy, of the EU and of NATO is based not on the interests of the European and international working class, but on the strategic prerogatives of the French state. “They are building Europe by undoing France. For us, we absolutely say no,” he said to. “We respect the institutions of France’s Fifth Republic,” he added.

This glorification of French nationalism corresponds to definite imperialist class interests. In its top leadership, LFI itself includes police, domestic intelligence and Special Forces elements that have for several years been regularly assaulting workers and youth protesting Macron and the PS.

Mélenchon did not criticize Macron because he imposes the financial aristocracy’s attacks on the working class, but because he is not sufficiently hostile to Germany. “Mr Macron is only the scribe for the European Commission and [German Chancellor Angela] Merkel,” he said, referring to German Chancellor Angela Merkel. He relaunched the call for a “Mediterranean Union” to establish a sphere of influence for French imperialism—a call first made by LR president Nicolas Sarkozy—against a Merkel-led “northern Europe.”

His opposition to a “Europe of defense,” that is an EU army, and his call for an “exit from NATO” are based on promoting French imperialism’s strategic interests and its pretensions to military autonomy, its nuclear forces, and its army.

Attacking immigrant workers in a right-wing nationalist tone, he echoed his German ally, *Die Linke*, claiming that immigration simply cuts wage levels. He made an overture to Italy’s current neo-fascist-led government and its anti-immigrant positions, declaring that he understands “the Italian population’s rejection” of immigrants.

The day before, LFI deputy Adrien Quatennens had hailed the “efficiency” of police forces who gunned down a man who carried out a knife attack in the Paris suburbs.

Workers have made bitter experiences with the nationalist, law-and-order and right-wing policies advanced by Mélenchon since LFI’s formation in 2016. One must ask: what is the balance sheet of their intervention in the struggles against the PS labor law in 2016 and Macron’s privatization of the National Railways this year?

Mélenchon helped drive these struggles into a dead end, backing the union bureaucracy as it signed agreements demolishing the Labor Code in 2016 and the railworkers’ statute in 2018. Repeatedly, Mélenchon called for subordinating struggles to the trade unions, as he did in the September 23, 2017 protest on Macron’s labor decrees: “We are ready to march behind them. ... We know the

strength of the trade union organizations.” LFI adapted itself to the state of emergency, which was aimed above all at building a police state regime to impose austerity on working people.

In last year’s presidential elections, Mélenchon took no position in the run-off even though his voters were overwhelmingly hostile to both Macron and neo-fascist candidate Marine Le Pen. He tacitly backed Macron, assisting the French media’s attempts to market Macron as the “lesser evil.”

Now that Mélenchon is playing up his ties to the right, the class character of his policy is emerging ever more clearly. In Marseille, he never criticized Macron’s decision to make exorbitant police powers of the state of emergency permanent by passing them in last year’s anti-terror law. In this, he was joined by the entire official French “far left,” including the NPA and the Workers Struggle (LO) organizations, who joined Mélenchon in an alliance during this year’s protests over Macron’s rail privatization.

This underscores the gap separating the nationalist and militarist policy of the pseudo-left and the perspective of the *Parti de l’égalité socialiste*, the French section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI). Rejecting Mélenchon’s populism and right-wing ties, the PES seeks to articulate an internationalist program for a struggle for power by the working class, against the capitalist EU and for the United Socialist States of Europe.

The PES fights to bring a Trotskyist program into the working class. It seeks at every point to establish the political independence of the working class from the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois parties, and lay out an independent policy. Against the rotten choice between Macron and Le Pen, it put forward the call for an active boycott of the presidential election—a policy that was in fact supported by a broad majority of Mélenchon’s electorate.

To fight Macron’s social austerity, the PES calls for building workers’ committees of action in the workplaces, who will organize struggles independently of pro-capitalist parties and trade unions who are signing on all Macron’s austerity policies. It alone is fighting to build an alternative to politicians like Mélenchon who aim to tie workers and youth to a bankrupt political establishment that is seeking to build a police state.

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