

France's "yellow vest" protests and the fraud of Mélenchon's "citizens revolution"

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The "yellow vest" protests in France and strikes organized on social media in Portugal have unmasked the petty-bourgeois milieu of union bureaucrats and official "left" parties in Europe. The eruption of a movement in the working class against social inequality blindsided them, busy as they were promoting austerity and war in presidential palaces and parliamentary speeches. Having played no role whatsoever in the movement against French President Emmanuel Macron, they are now trying to strangle it.

The Left Bloc (BE), the Portuguese allies of Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Unsubmissive France (LFI) party, does not hide its fear and loathing towards strikers and "yellow vests." BE official Francisco Louçã denounced them: "This is a far-right operation. They are using social media to whip up aggressive politicization in far-right terms."

Mélenchon, however, tries to influence the "yellow vests," pompously declaring they have vindicated his populism. On his blog, he writes: "I am jubilant. Current events are, I believe, the confirmation of the theoretical model formulated in my theory of citizens revolution summarized in my book *The Era of the People*."

If Mélenchon claims victory in the vapid realm of postmodernist theory, it is because for him, the "yellow vest" movement is in reality a defeat. The class struggle erupted when the "yellow vests," including tens of thousands of Mélenchon voters, took action independently of the LFI. Masses of workers in France and internationally have received a priceless lesson: that real struggle against the ruling elite requires opposing the anti-Marxist forces that for decades masqueraded as the "left."

Mélenchon's populist theory of "citizens revolution" serves only to block the revolutionary struggle against inequality, joblessness and war demanded by the "yellow vests," while denouncing Marxism and socialism. Discussing *The Era of the People*, Mélenchon declares:

"In all cases, my work does not say how the regime could fall under the blows of such a movement. All the more so, because in my view the result must be peaceful and democratic. That is to say, in all cases, we must find an institutional solution to events."

He writes that *The Era of the People* "breaks with traditional dogmas of the traditional left and far left," by advocating a "break with the centrality of the concept of proletariat and socialist revolution as the inevitable pairing in the dynamic of History." Echoing the big-business Socialist Party's (PS) faction in the National Assembly and burnishing his hopes to become Macron's prime minister via new legislative elections, he proposes a "motion of censure in parliament" against the government, a possible prelude to new elections.

Mélenchon's claim that democracy will be preserved by working within a national parliamentary framework that imposes the austerity and militarist diktats of the banks is a political fraud. The "yellow vest" movement has erupted precisely because, in France and across Europe, capitalist parliaments are trampling democracy and the working class underfoot.

The eruption of a largely working-class movement against social inequality and demanding Macron's ouster again demonstrated the revolutionary role of the proletariat. Claims that the Stalinist bureaucracy's restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union in 1991 marked the "End of History", the death of the class struggle and the triumph of capitalist democracy have been exposed. In six weeks, protests of a few hundred thousand workers, unemployed, and retired workers, along with self-employed workers and small businessmen, shook the French government to the core.

Macron now rules only from behind a wall of tens of thousands of riot police, backed by armored cars and helicopters on permanent standby, ready to evacuate him from the Elysée palace or any other "secure location" he

fears protesters might storm. The “yellow vests” have exposed the depth of popular opposition to illegitimate policies of austerity and war. Seeing no way to impose its diktat besides repression, the financial aristocracy is building a police state.

A half-century after the May-June 1968 general strike, tens of millions of workers in France and across Europe are looking on and drawing their own conclusions. The “yellow vest” movement is overwhelmingly popular, and a large majority of workers in France want it to continue. This entails drawing broader masses of the working class across Europe into struggle—against attempts by trade unions and populists like Mélenchon to isolate and wind down the movement—and consciously developing it as a Europe-wide struggle against capitalism and for socialism.

The protests have also exposed the crisis of leadership in the working class. Mélenchon—an ex-1968 student radical who joined the *Organisation communiste internationaliste* after its break with Trotskyism and the International Committee of the Fourth International in 1971, then worked in the PS for 30 years—is a petty-bourgeois counterrevolutionary. The task in France is to unmask the fraud that the PS or its petty-bourgeois periphery represent socialism, by building the *Parti de l'égalité socialiste*, the French section of the ICFI, as the Trotskyist vanguard.

This requires a conscious rejection of the petty-bourgeois, anti-Marxist politics peddled by Mélenchon. He declares that his book anticipated the “yellow vest” protests by replacing the working class with “the people” as the main revolutionary force:

It defines the people as the social result of the historic process of demographic expansion and urbanization (it mentions *homo urbanus*). It describes its dynamic of self-construction as a political subject under the whip of the need to access the networks on which everyone’s social survival depends... It explains the us-them opposition between the common good (based on dependence on the common ecosystem) and individual good, particularly that of contemporary “short-term” capital.

This is pretentious rubbish, with which Mélenchon hides the emptiness of his claim that “left populism” can refute Marxism and give a perspective for action. The “yellow vest” protests are not demanding internet access; they were organized on social media. Rather, they are demanding access to affordable transport, housing, and food; jobs; and an end to the financial-military

dictatorship of the banks and the European Union. Realizing these demands requires mobilizing the working class to take control of the economy and to take power.

While Mélenchon gives himself a “Green” tint to appear progressive, especially to his constituency in the upper middle class, he is in fact only discussing strategies to shut down the protests. This is clear from the alternatives he proposes for ending the “yellow vest” movement:

First there is the strategy of rotting out and demobilizing the movement; too risky and already too visible. Second, dissolve [parliament] and vote. This is the democratic option, as neither the protesters nor the government and its legislative majority will give up: decide with democracy. Third and final option: give the movement what it wants. This would be the easiest, but as time goes by, the demands have gotten much bigger. So really voting would be the best option, or in any case the most peaceful.

These are all ways for Macron to strangle the “yellow vests.” Mélenchon’s listing of the possibility of “rotting out” the movement, presumably by stirring up anti-immigrant or anti-Muslim hatreds, only underscores the right-wing character of his politics. As for his call for elections, its aim is to fool protesters into giving up without obtaining their demands, which he considers excessive.

Mélenchon’s anti-Marxist populism is the theoretical expression of the hostility of the affluent petty-bourgeois periphery of the PS and the financial aristocracy to the legitimate demands of the “yellow vests,” and of workers in struggle across Europe.

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