

French ruling elite attacks “yellow vests” while claiming to fight anti-Semitism

By Alex Lantier
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On Tuesday night, the big-business Socialist Party (PS) called rallies in several cities after an altercation Saturday between right-wing ex-Maoist commentator Alain Finkielkraut and a protester wearing a yellow vest. The man, known to French intelligence for his Islamist ties, called Finkielkraut a “dirty Zionist.” Since then, the media have mounted a furious campaign to denounce the “anti-Semitic left” and demand that the “yellow vests” support the PS demonstration.

Anti-Semitism is a reactionary and repugnant ideology, indissolubly tied to fascism and the worst genocide of world history: the massacre of the Jews in fascist Europe. The mass murder of six million Jews, including nearly all the over 76,000 Jews deported from France to Nazi death camps, with the active assistance of the Nazi-collaborationist Vichy regime, is a horrific crime that cannot and will not ever be forgotten. The struggle against any trace of anti-Semitic influence is part of the essential work of any socialist organization of the working class.

But the PS is in no position to lecture anyone about anti-Semitism. Examining the reactionary record of the PS and of President Emmanuel Macron’s Republic on the March (LRM) party exposes their pretenses to oppose anti-Semitism as a political fraud. While they mount a campaign to tar the entire “yellow vest” movement against social inequality as genocidal and racist, and to discredit rising opposition in the working class across Europe, they are themselves appealing to racism and strengthening neo-fascistic tendencies.

The PS invited virtually the entire French political establishment to join its protest. Prime Minister Edouard Philippe and 23 other LRM ministers participated, together with former Presidents François Hollande and Nicolas Sarkozy. The Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF), the Greens, the Democratic Movement of François Bayrou, the leader of the right-wing Republicans (LR) party Laurent Wauquiez and Nicolas Dupont-Aignan of the Arise France (DLF) party, allied to neo-fascist leader Marine Le Pen, all attended.

The PS leader, Olivier Faure, invited Marine Le Pen, saying she would be “welcome.” He refused to invite her National Rally (RN) party, stating that “its entire history is precisely bound up with the question of anti-Semitism and racism.” Faure wanted to get the support of Vichy’s political descendants against the “yellow vests,” but without unmasking his own fraudulent maneuver by letting figures like Marine’s father Jean-Marie, who has been convicted of making anti-Semitic statements, attend a rally supposedly called against anti-Semitism.

Le Pen ultimately did not attend the rally. The RN published a communiqué refusing to march “alongside organizations and politicians who either have done nothing against the spread of Islamist networks in popular neighborhoods, or encouraged them, or even discuss them in a criminal and irresponsible doublespeak.”

While the “yellow vest” protesters have mobilized with the support of most of the French population against Macron, the PS is mobilizing the government with the support of the political establishment against the “yellow vests,” while making its deals with anti-Semitic forces. It received broad support in official circles. Alongside the Freemasonry, the unions sent top officials to the PS protest, after having called off strikes in order to isolate the “yellow vest” protests.

At the rally, General Confederation of Labor (CGT) chief Philippe Martinez again denounced the “yellow vests,” whom he had slandered as neo-fascists before their first protest on November 17 in order to justify the unions’ decision to shut down strikes in solidarity with their actions. He called for CGT members to join the PS protest, however. There, he asserted that the “yellow vests” racism “has shocked me from the beginning of the protests, and a small part of the yellow vest movement is poisoning the rest.”

The only sections of the political establishment that were not welcome were those who did not fall in line with the media campaign slandering the “yellow vests.” Unsubmissive France’s Jean-Luc Mélenchon complained he had not been invited. He was the target of a media campaign

for having criticized “the political exploitation of the struggle against racism and anti-Semitism” by the PS. But Mélenchon, a former PS minister, finally decided to join in this act of political exploitation and participate in the PS rally in Marseille.

PS-LRM propaganda against anti-Semitism is hypocritical and corrupt to the bone. The recent rise of anti-Semitic crimes across Europe is an extremely serious phenomenon; they have increased 60 percent over the last year in Germany and 69 percent in France. But it is impossible to fight against the rise of anti-Semitism without fighting the entire ruling class and the capitalist system.

In Germany, official statistics highlight the role of the far right, which is responsible for a large majority of such crimes. But the far right is prospering with the tacit support of Germany’s Grand Coalition government, whose Interior Minister Horst Seehofer infamously hailed neo-Nazi riots in Chemnitz during which a Jewish restaurant was attacked.

In France, the PS and Macron’s LRM government that emerged from it in 2017 have played the central role in legitimizing the heritage of French political anti-Semitism.

Hollande twice invited Marine Le Pen to the Elysée presidential palace. These were the first times a neo-fascist politician had been invited to the Elysée. At the same time, he sought to inscribe in the constitution deprivation of nationality, the legal mechanism that Vichy used to deport the Jews to the death camps and justify repressing the Resistance. Finally, last November Macron hailed Philippe Pétain, the head of the Vichy regime that approved these deportations.

The target of all these policies that reinforce anti-Semitism is growing opposition in the working class. Alongside the “yellow vest” protests in France, strikes in Portugal, Belgium and Germany are unfolding. The ruling class is terrified, and it is seeking to foment by all means necessary the political conditions to more broadly carry out repression.

Thus PS Prime Minister Manuel Valls attended a rally in Madrid of the Spanish right-wing parties including the new fascist party, Vox. This demonstration aimed to install a right-wing coalition government that would include Vox—a party that defends the record of fascist dictator Francisco Franco’s army during the civil war, that is, the use of mass murder against left-wing workers.

The “yellow vest” movement expresses the rejection by workers and significant layers of the middle classes of policies that have been imposed in Europe over decades. It is critical now to draw political lessons. After three decades of growing imperialist war since the Stalinist dissolution of the USSR in 1991, and a decade of deep austerity since the 2008 crash, capitalism is in a mortal crisis. The growth of anti-Semitism is again indissolubly bound up with this crisis

of capitalism.

The struggle against it requires a conscious break with all these political tendencies that legitimize anti-Semitism while claiming to fight it, and a struggle to build a Trotskyist vanguard in the working class. Faure sought to present the PS as the historic opponent of anti-Semitism by mentioning the participation of PS founder François Mitterrand in a protest against the defacing of a cemetery in Carpentras in 1990. In fact, this example refutes his arguments.

Mitterrand, an ex-Vichy official, cynically participated as a scandal erupted about his continuing ties to René Bousquet, the Vichy chief of police who organized the Vél d’Hiv mass round-up of Jews for deportation in 1942. This scandal illustrated that the alliance formed between the PCF, petty bourgeois Pabloite forces like today’s New Anticapitalist Party, and the PS after the May 1968 general strike was a reactionary trap for the workers’ movement. It handed over the working class bound hand-and-foot to the PS, a bourgeois party pursuing austerity and militarist policies.

Thirty years later, the descendants of these parties are tacitly promoting anti-Semitism to poison the political atmosphere, all the while cynically claiming to combat it.

The Parti de l’égalité socialiste (PES) bases its policy on the growing international upsurge of the class struggle, of which the “yellow vest” movement is one expression in France. It fights anti-Semitism by seeking to arm the working class with a Marxist and internationalist, that is to say Trotskyist program to fight for political power, against Stalinist and Pabloite tendencies that have capitulated to capitalism, which is rotting on its feet.

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