

COVID-19: Mélenchon offers national unity with France's banks

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While President Emmanuel Macron takes France out of lockdown amid the COVID-19 pandemic, needlessly putting millions of lives at risk, Jean-Luc Mélenchon wants to stifle rising anger among teachers, rail workers and others ordered to return to work. This is what we learn from an interview the head of Unsubmissive France (LFI) gave to a group of Spanish, Swiss, Italian and German newspapers.

Asked about the pandemic, Mélenchon says: “Until now, our strategy has been direct confrontation on all subjects, to produce political awareness. But right now, a direct confrontation would not promote political awareness, it would do the opposite, it would block it.” He adds, “In France we represent the most rebellious part of our people. But I wouldn’t want the French to infer from our attitude that everyone does what they want.”

For LFI, Mélenchon adds, the pandemic “has set a style. There could be no question of attacking those in power.”

The pandemic is unmasking Mélenchon and all the petty-bourgeois, anti-Marxist populists as servants of the banks. LFI’s Spanish ally, Podemos, is in power with the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) and ending lock-down measures with the support of the trade unions. As LFI proclaims it will not “attack” Macron, Podemos has published estimates that hundreds of thousands could die from COVID-19 and has sent police officers to attack steelworkers striking for the right to shelter at home.

As French and European trade unions call no strike action despite the pandemic, Mélenchon wants to impose on workers the diktat of the financial aristocracy.

The European Central Bank (ECB) and the European states are showering the banks and big bosses with

trillions of euros in recovery plans. But they are forcing workers and small businesses back to work, and children back to school—even as more than 20,000 new cases of COVID-19 are reported every day in Europe—claiming that there is no money to sustain workers and small businesses during the lock-down. Already, new outbreaks of COVID-19 are emerging internationally because of the lifting of lockdowns carried out by the ruling class with contempt for human lives.

Mélenchon does not criticize this policy; he shares it. He demands that the ECB keep showering the banks with trillions of euros by purchasing the sovereign debt they hold: “My proposal is this. All state debts already held by the ECB must be frozen. They are converted into interest-free perpetual debt... Second step: the Central Bank is asked to buy back and also freeze all remaining government debt in private banks.”

Mélenchon boasts that his proposal has support from right-wing political operatives and bankers: “People who have nothing to do with my political ideology are in favor, like Alain Minc, Mario Draghi, Dominique Strauss-Kahn and even a European commissioner.”

In the face of the German financial authorities’ traditional opposition to this policy, Mélenchon incites nationalist hatreds against the peoples of northern Europe. “Northern Europe is unbearable! The rogue leaders are there,” he complains. He especially attacks Germany, which “accumulates trade surpluses and nobody ever says anything even though it’s forbidden by the treaties.”

The record of LFI, Podemos and other “left populists” like the former pro-austerity Greek government of Syriza (the “Coalition of the Radical Left”), vindicate the warnings of the International Committee of the Fourth International. These populist

forces represent the interests of privileged layers of the middle classes in academia, the union bureaucracies and the media, integrated into the existing order. Manipulating national hatreds, they attempt to divide and strangle a struggle by the international working class.

Workers do not have to bail out the financial aristocracy, which is putting millions at risk by ending the lockdowns. In France and throughout Europe and the world, workers can exercise their right to strike to avoid risking their lives for non-essential work. Organised in action committees independent of the unions and forces like LFI, workers can decide for themselves if it is safe to resume work. Since the health emergency requires using against the disease the public funds now being handed over to the banks, action committees face the task of establishing control of production and expropriating the financial aristocracy through an international struggle for workers power and socialism.

Mélenchon knows that political radicalization is developing in France and internationally, but he wants to push it to the right. “This is a period of political awakening,” he says.

But he goes on to respond positively to Macron’s call for a “sacred union” during the pandemic. The “Sacred Union” was the chauvinistic and militaristic alliance during World War I between the proto-fascist forces of the *Action Française*, other bourgeois parties, and the social democracy, led by Jules Guesde, which betrayed the working class and voted the for war credits in 1914. While he says in the interview that he “rejects” Macron’s warlike vocabulary—and has stated elsewhere that he rejects the Sacred Union—Mélenchon makes clear in the interview his support for the policies of the Sacred Union.

For ideas on what policies to pursue during the pandemic, he says, “We looked in the laws of 1915-16 to see what had been done. French society was a peasant society; all the men were at the front and were dying in the millions. We were interested to see how social cohesion was guaranteed at that time.”

With this sinister comment, Mélenchon demonstrates that LFI is not only prepared to accept mass deaths caused by the end of the lockdown but has consciously broken all ties with the socialist traditions of the left, let alone the standpoint of Marxism. In the face of the

pandemic, it aims to guarantee social cohesion and to stifle workers’ opposition with reactionary methods.

How did the Sacred Union “guarantee social cohesion” in 1915–1916, while sending millions of soldiers to be massacred at the front? It used militaristic, xenophobic and anti-Semitic propaganda. When anger erupted in the French army in the mutinies of 1917, after the Russian revolution began, the general and future Nazi-collaborationist dictator Philippe Pétain had hundreds of mutineers shot. Although founded on anti-German hatreds, the Sacred Union paradoxically prepared the Nazi collaboration, hailed by the *Action française*, and the vote of full powers to Pétain by the social-democracy and other bourgeois parties in 1940.

A politician who is “interested” in the bloody work done by the Sacred Union is a petty-bourgeois demagogue fascinated by the extreme right.

Mélenchon’s interview must serve as a warning to the workers. During the pandemic, not only the banks and their direct servants like Macron, but also the “left-wing populists” will be bitterly hostile to the struggles of the working class.

Mélenchon’s role is reactionary and cynical. He salutes Prime Minister Édouard Philippe, saying that regarding the end of the lockdown: “we are talking on the phone like buddies at a bar.” Calling Philippe “an elegant man, pleasant company”, Mélenchon applauds him: “Édouard Philippe is right-wing and has never claimed otherwise.” Mélenchon, for his part, does the truly dirty work of claiming to be a populist, and occasionally even posturing as left, while at the same time conveying right-wing ideas.

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