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Mélenchon pledges to serve as French prime minister under Macron or neo-fascist Le Pen

In an hour-long prime-time interview on BFM-TV last night, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the former presidential candidate of the France insoumise (LFI) party, called on the French people to elect him as prime minister in the June legislative elections. He pledged to serve as prime minister under whichever of the two presidential candidates wins in the April 24 runoff, incumbent President Emmanuel Macron or neo-fascist Marine Le Pen.

Mélenchon's announcement that he will serve under either of the two extreme-right candidates is a slap in the face to the nearly 8 million people who voted for him. Millions backed Mélenchon to express their hostility to both Macron and Le Pen, notably Muslim workers threatened both by Le Pen and Macron's own Islamophobic "anti-separatist" law. Yet Mélenchon, instead of trying to marshal opposition to the next president, made clear he would collaborate with the next president, even if this president is a neo-fascist.

This points to the significance of the call by the *Parti de l'égalité socialiste* (PES), the French section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), to build a movement in the working class to reject both candidates, boycott the election, and prepare the struggles to come against the next president. The PES alone is arming workers and youth with a perspective for an irreconcilable struggle against both reactionary candidates.

Mélenchon is objectively in an extremely powerful position. He won the support of voters under 35, carried the working class districts of France's major cities, and won 10 of

France's 16 largest cities. If he tried to rally his voters against both Macron and Le Pen, calling for them to engage in strikes and protests, he could rapidly shut down the French economy. Such an action, carried out in opposition to NATO war threats against Russia and official inaction on the COVID-19 pandemic, could have a vast global impact, as did the May 1968 French general strike.

Mélenchon, however, aims not to politically mobilize but to political suppress his voters, making clear that they should resign themselves to a far-right presidency that will enjoy the political support of the presidential candidate for whom they voted.

Mélenchon cynically tried to present this ultra-reactionary policy as a “militant” struggle. He claimed that he is asking French voters to massively vote for LFI, which currently is leading in races for 105 of the 577 seats in the National Assembly, so that LFI could form a government and name Mélenchon prime minister. “I will be prime minister not by the grace of Mr Macron or Mrs Le Pen, but because the French people will have wanted this,” he said.

When BFM-TV interviewer Bruce Toussaint asked him under which presidential candidate he would agree to serve as prime minister, Mélenchon replied, “That is a rather secondary issue.” Asked again by Toussaint whether he would really serve under a neo-fascist president if Le Pen won in the polls, Mélenchon indicated that he would, saying, “Vox populi, vox dei.”

Mélenchon told Toussaint that his views on neo-fascism had changed and become far less hostile than they were 50 years ago, at the foundation of the far-right National Front (today the National Rally of Marine Le Pen) in 1972. He said, “At the very beginning of the struggle against the National Front, I took a very harsh position. Inspired by the past, I said that we should not accept them... Now the question is not posed that way for me. It is posed in the sense that fundamentally [Marine Le Pen] carries with her a vision of France which means that it is fundamentally another France. It is not the France in which we are.”

Mélenchon indicated that his differences with Le Pen are concentrated on the question of the rights of people born on French soil to automatically receive French citizenship, and on whether to organize a referendum on banning the Islamic veil in France.

The extremely limited character of the disagreements Mélenchon claims to have with neo-fascism makes clear that Mélenchon himself has travelled far to the right. He is part of a deeply reactionary consensus in the French ruling class in favor of totally abandoning the struggle against COVID-19 and participation in a NATO war with Russia in Ukraine. Indeed, Mélenchon did not even mention the pandemic in the BFM-TV interview, though around a thousand people die of COVID-19 each week in France.

Mélenchon was also silent on how Macron has plunged the state deep into debt during the pandemic to finance bank bailouts that massively enriched the financial aristocracy, with the 500 wealthiest individuals in France increasing their wealth by 40 percent in the year after the launching of the bank bailout plans. This made French public debt surge to around 115 percent of France's Gross Domestic Product.

On the war in Russia, where forces in the media have repeatedly accused Mélenchon of complicity with the Kremlin, he reassured BFM-TV that he supports NATO. He recalled that on the morning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, he criticized Moscow and claimed that Russia bears "sole responsibility" for the war.

It is only in this context that one can evaluate the few demagogic promises made by Mélenchon. He noted that "Millions of people are caught by the throat in this country," pledged to cap natural gas prices and increase the minimum wage to €1,400 monthly, and proposed citizen-initiated referendums as in Switzerland. But one cannot finance a meaningful increase in workers' living standards while wasting countless billions of euros on bank bailouts and war.

The defense of fundamental social rights requires a determined assault on the privileges of the super-rich, the impounding of public funds that they have pilfered, the end of the war, and a struggle to stop mass deaths from COVID-19. But it is absurd and false to claim that one could implement such policies as a prime minister answerable to a President Macron or Le Pen.

This is why the PES calls for an active boycott of the second round, to steel workers and youth for a struggle against the reactionary presidential candidates and unify them in a class-based opposition to the next president. It is now clear that this call places the PES in direct opposition not only to Macron and Le Pen, but also to Mélenchon. In the name of a

positive re-evaluation of neo-fascism, Mélenchon is extending political support to both reactionary candidates.

Moreover, it makes clear the opposition between the PES and not only Mélenchon, but all the bankrupt parties whom Mélenchon is proposing to unify in a so-called Popular Union. He told BFM-TV that the Greens, the Stalinist French Communist Party, and the Pabloite New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) could all join the coalition he is proposing. The NPA has already responded positively to Mélenchon's call, issuing a "Letter of the New Anti-capitalist Party to the Popular Union" declaring that "we are happy about the initiative you have taken" and concluding, "We must meet in the coming days."

What Mélenchon is doing is not unifying the left in struggle, but regrouping a coalition of bankrupt petty-bourgeois parties that support imperialist war and mass infection with COVID-19, and that are clearly prepared to sanction alliances with neo-fascism.

Under these conditions, the PES again calls for an active boycott of the second round, and states that the PES is the Trotskyist alternative to the pseudo left that must be built.

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