

Popular Front works to tie French anti-fascist protests to capitalist rule

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Around 640,000 people marched in cities across France to protest the rise of far-right parties in the June 9 European elections, amid fears that the far-right National Rally (RN) could gain a record vote in snap elections President Emmanuel Macron has called for June 30 and July 7.

Hundreds of thousands of workers and youth protested to express their anger and opposition to the existing order. Protesters spoke of their concern over NATO military escalation against Russia, genocide in Gaza, and austerity and police violence at home. These sentiments reflect deep-going opposition to French and international capitalism.

This opposition runs directly into the obstacle posed, however, by the pro-capitalist Popular Front alliance that called the protests, together with the union bureaucracies. It brings together Jean-Luc Mélenchon's France Unbowed (LFI) party, the big business Socialist Party (PS) and the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF). The PS and the PCF are parties of capitalist government that have imposed decades of austerity and war on the workers; Mélenchon is a former PS minister.

Mélenchon's staggering cynicism was on display Sunday, when he warmly greeted former PS President François Hollande into the Popular Front. Seven years after leaving office, Hollande remains deeply unpopular. He is infamous for invading Mali, imposing a two-year state of emergency that suspended democratic rights, and using savage police state violence to suppress strikes against his labor law, as well as other anti-worker policies.

One cannot fight the far right in alliance with Hollande, who feverishly promoted its growth. In 2015, he became the first French president to welcome a neo-fascist official, RN leader Marine Le Pen, to the Elysée presidential palace. During his state of emergency, he tried to effect a reconciliation with the neo-fascists by legalizing deprivation of nationality—a policy used during the Nazi occupation of France to justify deporting Jews and resistance fighters.

Mélenchon embraced Hollande, however, after the PS announced that Hollande would come out of retirement to run as a Popular Front candidate for his old seat in Corrèze. Mélenchon tweeted: "The Socialist Party chooses the candidates it wants. Any ally is welcome to fight the RN, including François Hollande. We must throw old grudges by the wayside."

This alliance with brutally reactionary forces, justified on the bankrupt grounds of voting for the lesser evil, is a political trap for the working class. It ties the workers to representatives of French

finance capital who not only call to escalate the NATO war with Russia in Ukraine, but have played a central role in legitimizing neo-fascism. It works thus to demoralize and sow political confusion among workers and youth mobilizing against the far right.

WSWS reporters intervened at rallies in Paris and in southern France. In Paris, Emilie and Claudia told the WSWS they were protesting the rise of the far right and were also concerned about the NATO escalation against Russia.

They said, "It is frightening to think that we could soon be at war. We have seen that at no point has anyone asked what the French people want about this."

Asked why so many people vote for the far right despite the French far right's historical record of collaboration with Nazism, Emilie pointed to the bankruptcy of the establishment "left" parties, saying: "Everyone is totally fed up. People have the feeling that none of the other parties represent them."

She also pointed to the financial aristocracy's promotion of the far right, particularly by the media empire of French billionaire Vincent Bolloré.

She said:

The media also play a role, with CNews, which is now the most widely watched cable news channel in France. They distill fear. People live in the countryside, never meet immigrants, and start thinking the threat is everywhere. ... Social media also play an enormous role. Videos of [RN candidate Jordan] Bardella showed him as a charismatic person and gave no idea of what his politics actually are.

Claudia, who lived in former mining areas of northern France deindustrialized by PS governments, which now vote heavily for the RN, said:

People there feel so abandoned that they turn towards the only people who seem to pay any little bit of attention to them at all. They fall into the trap of telling themselves, "We haven't tried this party yet," even if they also deep down know that's very false, too.

The WSWs interviewed Sarah and Lucie, who also stressed the ruling class' promotion of the neo-fascists. Sarah said:

It has been years that the far right was presented as respectable, democratic and harmless parties. All Bolloré's TV stations give them the green light. And the left-wing parties have for a long time been deeply disappointing. We had disgusting laws under Hollande, and then we had Macron. So certain people react against that and say the far right is not so bad, given what else they have been served up.

Lucie said she might hold her nose and vote for the PS anyway:

The left must unite. If they all start saying, "Yes but I want this," if they demand all sorts of things as usual and ultimately there is no real unity, we'll have the right, even the far right in power. ... Obviously the left parties are not without faults, but I don't want to start talking about whether we ally with the PS or not. As long as they respect the Popular Front electoral accords, we must focus on elections and fight for them to keep their promises.

When WSWs reporters noted that the PS has a long record ever since coming to power in 1981 of rapidly violating its election promises and being impervious to popular opposition, Lucie said:

Then there will have to be a general strike. We will have weapons of war facing us on the other side then, we will have to avoid being massacred by the police.

The WSWs also spoke to Anna, a supporter of the middle-class *Lutte Ouvrière* (LO) party who also reads the WSWs. Asked why she was at the rally, she said:

War tensions are mounting as are far-right pressures not only in France, but worldwide in general. These parties bring us towards war and destruction. ... If things continue like this, we are headed straight for World War III. That scares me. French workers have no interest in fighting Russian or Ukrainian workers. Karl Liebknecht said that the enemy is in our own country.

Anna expressed her distrust of the Popular Front:

The trade unions, the Popular Front alliance, I'm not necessarily for them. This alliance from Hollande to [NPA

presidential candidate Philippe] Poutou is lying to the workers. It says, "Vote for us, we'll do the rest."

She noted that the disillusionment and apathy generated by these parties creates fertile terrain for the rise of the neo-fascist vote: "The people have not become fascists, but there is no movement in the working class."

However, in line with LO's longstanding opposition to building a revolutionary leadership in the working class, Anna argued against building an organization to give political leadership to mass opposition to the neo-fascists, which should, according to her, remain entirely spontaneous. She said:

There is a reaction to the rise of the far right, it must be much stronger. However, it must come from the workers themselves. We cannot have any unilateral leaderships.

The threat of far-right rule and global war are in reality urgent warnings to the working class in France and internationally that a Marxist revolutionary leadership must be built. Plans are very advanced for a massive military escalation targeting Russia, which will be the topic of a NATO summit in Washington only two days after the final round of the French elections.

Mélenchon's alliance with Hollande and the PS underscores that LFI and the Popular Front will be no real obstacle to the eruption of a broader, even bloodier war, combined with calls for further deep austerity in order to finance France's military build-up. This underscores the urgency of building a Marxist internationalist revolutionary leadership that can crush the influence over workers of the capitalist parties and lead workers in a struggle for state power and for socialism.



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