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France

Mélenchon, in search of a new policy?

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The last elections were a blow for Jean Luc Mélenchon. Far from passing in front of the PS, as he had claimed it would, the Left Front (Front de Gauche) obtained only a little more than 6%.

This was a failure.

It was also the result of a policy that did not want to clarify the question of independence with respect to the PS. As a result, when PCF was allied with the PS in the last municipal elections, the Left Front exploded, and seeking an alliance with the Greens could not constitute an alternative to the government's policy .

There too failure.

As a result, the initial formula of Front de Gauche was “null and void”.

Then Mélenchon declared that he did “not want any longer to bring together the left but the people”, and referring to the experiment of “Podemos” in the Spanish State, he took his distance, placing himself beyond the parties... and launched a new project: a movement for the Sixth Republic. [\[1\]](#)

The Podemos experience is, indeed, one of the most interesting experiences in Europe, of a vast popular gathering of more than 100,000 members, running at between 15 and 20% in the opinion polls, on the initiative of personalities and radical left currents, including our comrades of Izquierda Anticapitalista. But one cannot seize the dynamics of Podemos without taking into account the principal features of the Spanish situation: crisis of the post-Franco transitional regime, national questions coming to an acute crisis in Catalonia, impressive fightback against the brutality of the austerity plans in the Spanish state, the *indignado@s* movement, a succession of nation-wide strikes, the “tides” of mobilization in health and education. Podemos, seemed the political expression of these movements with new personalities, like Pablo Iglesias, incarnating them – a break from the traditional political game.

There is something right in Mélenchon's approach, to aim for the emergence of a movement breaking with the traditional left, but is he best placed to incarnate the revival, as former minister and the representative Left front marked by the choice of the PCF to ally with the Socialist Party?

But more substantially, Podemos is the expression of a mass movement which has not yet marked the French economic situation. The French situation was not submerged by movements like those “indignados”, the “social tides”, the national liberation movements. This is what Mélenchon does not understand. He takes from Podemos the expression of strong personalities and the references to the South American revolutionary nationalist model, such as Chavism in Venezuela. However, one thing is the progressive role that Chavez played against American imperialism, another thing is a political and socio-economic model which falls under the long tradition of Latin American *caudillismo* and state capitalism based on oil revenue. In short, we do not believe that this kind of model can be an answer to the challenges of the crisis in Europe in this beginning of the 21st century.

Also when he claims to launch a movement for the Sixth Republic, far from basing it on the preparation of a constituent process from below, of a truly popular movement, he presents it as the support of a candidature for the presidential election, giving his approach a “Bonapartist” character, of being above parties. Moreover, on the contents of his Sixth Republic, Mélenchon remains as ever evasive on the elimination or not of the election of the president of

the republic by universal suffrage. There still, his Chavist inspirations do not lead him towards implementing a really democratic project.

Lastly, after having underestimated the need and the consequences of the debate with PCF on the relationship with the PS – remember that when the NPA raised this question it was accused of being sectarian – and then having had himself a more than ambiguous stance on claiming to bring together the left majority in order to be Hollande's prime minister... Mélenchon follows a path of skirting around the labour movement and what remains of the left. In recent years, we have rejected all the formulas of union of the left with the PS, which has become a neo-liberal party, but we do not think that the left can come together without the trade unions, associations, currents, which, from the left, oppose the government, or, when there is real activity of the masses, without self-organization. Initiatives like April 12th [\[2\]](#) demonstrate this. But the unity of the employees and their organizations or their self-organization requires a policy of independence from the state and its institutions. It is a question which Jean Luc Mélenchon, defender of a republic that makes an amalgam of state and nation, still does not raise.

[1] The current French constitution is the Fifth Republic, introduced in 1958, replacing a parliamentary-based system with one strongly centred on the role of the president.

[2] [Notes on the French situation after the local elections and the 12th April demonstration.](#)