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**Bring down the Macron government!**



Protesters chant slogans during a protest in Paris, Monday, March 20, 2023. [AP Photo/Lewis Joly]

This week's tumultuous events in France have torn the "democratic" mask off of the capitalist state, exposing it as a dictatorship of the financial oligarchy.

President Emmanuel Macron began Monday by trampling the will of the overwhelming majority of the French people, imposing his pension cuts without even a vote in parliament. Protests erupted every night in France's major cities, to which Macron responded by brazenly declaring that no one can challenge the legitimacy of his government. On Thursday, police assaulted marches by millions of workers and began requisitioning workers to break ongoing refinery and garbage strikes.

A powerful mass movement is developing, but from the outset it finds itself at an impasse. Every one of the half-measures from within the political system that Macron's rivals proposed to stop him have failed. The parliament failed to censure Macron for forcing it to

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adopt the cuts without a vote. Macron's collapse in the polls and growing expressions of fear within ruling circles over the mass protests did not persuade Macron to retreat. Nor did the union bureaucracies' one-day strikes.

The direction of the class struggle inescapably points to this: Macron must go, and the French executive presidency with its vast anti-democratic powers must be abolished. While struggling to bring down Macron, moreover, the working class must fight to develop rank-and-file committees of action, to lay the basis for what will replace his regime.

Macron is emerging as the direct personification of the rule of finance capital and the focal point of all the ruling elite's conspiracies against the working class. "L'Etat, c'est moi," ("The state is me"), said King Louis XIV, the founder of the French absolute monarchy in the 17th century. Nearly 400 years later, Macron imposed his diktat over France by asserting that the financial markets would not tolerate a failure to impose his cuts.

His ability to impose the pension cuts without a vote flows from the semi-dictatorial powers Charles de Gaulle demanded in 1958, amid the French war against Algerian independence and a coup led by pro-colonial forces in the French army. De Gaulle obtained for the presidency vast powers to impose legislation, coordinate police operations and control the army, written into the constitution of the Fifth Republic. This office has now become the cockpit of a dictatorship of the banks against the people.

Workers cannot, however, leave the struggle to bring down Macron to the union bureaucracy and its petty-bourgeois allies, such as Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Unsubmissive France (LFI) party, Olivier Besancenot's New Anticapitalist Party (NPA), or Nathalie Arthaud's Workers Struggle (LO) party. LFI, the NPA and LO are parties whose candidates, when promoted as "left" by capitalist media, have received millions of votes. But they stand far closer to Macron than to the workers. They are giving no other perspective to the movement than for it to gradually die down.

Significantly, in earlier decades, Mélenchon often raised the demand for a Sixth Republic, seeking to drive working class opposition to the Fifth Republic into the dead end of campaigning for a constitutional reform of the French capitalist state. But today, when the issue of bringing down Macron and the dictatorial set-up of the Fifth Republic is squarely posed, Mélenchon has abandoned this question.

If Mélenchon and his allies refuse to launch a political offensive against Macron, it is because they do not want in any way to reveal to the working class its own strength. Indeed, if a movement in the working class toppled France's massively unpopular

president, this would inevitably raise demands for far more profound changes to the political and economic structure of society.

Instead, Mélenchon is reacting to Macron's cuts by peddling illusions that protests can still change Macron's mind, convincing him to withdraw the law. Mélenchon said: "Because the process of parliamentary censure has not worked, the time has come to pass to popular censure. I express the wish that this censure will express itself massively, in all places and under all circumstances, and that it allow us to force the law to be taken back."

Behind Mélenchon's vague rhetoric about "popular censure" of Macron, there is a perspective: Workers are to be limited to periodic one-day actions assaulted by the cops, and which do not defend ongoing strikes against police attack. This is a perspective to exhaust workers' energy, give them no clear way forward, and thus defuse the explosive political crisis that is emerging.

Mélenchon knows what he is doing. His career began with the May 1968 French general strike, which was betrayed by the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF). By blocking the workers from taking power after the police and the de Gaulle government collapsed, the PCF bureaucracy ceded political initiative to the right. On May 30, a pro-Gaullist protest gathered several hundred thousand people, initiating de Gaulle's offensive to stabilize capitalist rule.

Ultimately, de Gaulle dissolved the parliament and held legislative elections on June 23-30, 1968. Amid immense working class disillusionment with the PCF's sell-out of the general strike, the election produced a massive victory of the right-wing parties.

For all the many differences between 1968 and 2023, this type of political demobilization of the workers is what Mélenchon, now in a parliamentary alliance with the PCF, is setting out to do. The forces that stand to benefit from this political treachery include not only the right-winger Macron, but also his neo-fascist rival, Marine Le Pen.

Since the working class cannot rely on establishment parties and union bureaucracies to fight Macron and the executive presidency, they need to build new organizations of struggle: rank-and-file committees, independent of the union bureaucracies and their "social dialog" with Macron. Such committees can organize strikes and protests, rally support for workers threatened by police, and oppose the demobilizing influence of the establishment parties.

United internationally in the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, they will allow workers to rally support from growing class struggles outside France. This acquires decisive significance as workers strike against inflation and to

defend wages in Germany and Britain, in rail strikes in Belgium, the Netherlands and Italy, and in teachers strikes in Portugal and across Europe. These struggles objectively are uniting workers in a common fight against inflation and austerity, ruinous military spending amid the NATO war on Russia, and police-state rule.

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