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## ***Mobilization against pension reform continues: In the face of social anger, Macron replaces legitimacy with truncheon***

The only argument left to the government is that of order. The demonstrations are no longer about political debate, about a situation to which the government should respond by addressing the social and political forces that drive it, but only about public order, and the weapon of police repression becomes the only political response, with the attempt to stifle the movement with batons, tear gas and rubber bullets.

March, 2023



Since 16 March and the application of art. 49.3 [to impose the reform by stealing the decision from Parliament], Macron and his government have provoked a new wave of popular mobilization, in all its forms: renewable strikes, blockades, demonstrations and

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even incorporation into the student movement. But, above all, the social crisis is now joined by a real political crisis, a crisis of the regime, from which, right now, Macron is not sure he can get out, because it is his legitimacy, his claim to continue at the head of the country in the next four years that is at stake, the legality of his formal institutional legitimacy is increasingly contradictory to a popular legitimacy that he totally lacks.



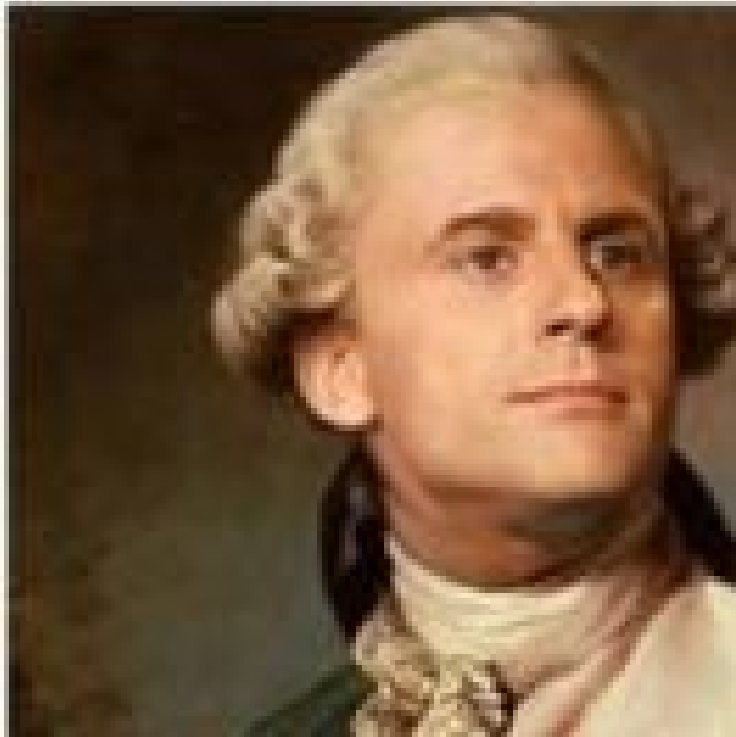
For the past 10 days, the government has pretended to ignore this reality, to ignore the rage and anger of millions of women and men in this country. As one young protester put it: "until now it was at us, now it is democracy." Since March 16, every afternoon, in hundreds of cities and often small villages, there have been spontaneous demonstrations, with or without the presence of trade unions, rage demonstrations against 49.3 and Macron's contempt. After 49.3, the rejection on March 20, in the National Assembly, of a motion of censure that would have led to the rejection of the law and the resignation of the government (the motion obtained 278 votes, 9 votes short of the absolute majority, the first time this has happened since 1992) was further proof of the isolation of the president and his parliamentary minority, and an additional reason for popular cholera. Of the 61 Republican deputies, 19 voted in favor of the motion of censure, well above all expectations.

That isolation did not prevent Emmanuel Macron from speaking on TF1 and France 2 (the two main television networks) at 13.00 hours on March 22, 24 hours before the new national day of mobilization, showing himself confident, as if the anger of the street did not go with him. A spectacular exercise of aristocratic contempt to try to appear solid

before his vacillating electorate, presenting himself "with his boots on", an exercise in which he only managed to confront the working classes even more. Once again, he stated that his reform was justified, that he had been elected to implement it and that, moreover, it had just been democratically approved by Parliament, which made social mobilization useless.

This supposed democratic legitimacy is surely the most irritating factor of recent weeks. The system of political representation, based on elections every five years, is far from true popular sovereignty, with elections conducted democratically by the affected populations. But the French Fifth Republic is, in itself, the European country with all possible defects of representation.

France has a true presidential regime, in which a single person, elected by universal suffrage, has the main executive powers in foreign and domestic policy, the government being only his cabinet and the prime minister having a secondary role, except in case of cohabitation (risk, a priori and except accident, discarded since the legislative elections were imposed after the presidential one). Double punishment for democratic rights, in France there are two chambers, the Senate and the Assembly. The Senate, an "assembly of notables", is not elected by direct suffrage, but by 160,000 electors. The National Assembly is not elected by proportional representation, but by a two-round single-member ballot, which does not reflect the reality of political currents and limits representation. Thus, France's electoral system, the 'Fatherland of Human Rights', ticks all the boxes for insulting fundamental democratic rights.



Beyond these general considerations, the 2022 elections have accentuated all these deficiencies inherent in the Fifth Republic. Macron only got one in five votes of the electorate (20.07%). As the presidential elections are held in two rounds, in the second, against Marine Le Pen, she won 38.55% of the electorate. The contribution of votes came from voters, mostly from the left, who only voted for him to block the extreme right. Obviously, the legitimacy of its programme alone reaches the threshold of 20%! In the legislative elections that followed, the candidates of his alliance won 11.97% of the electorate in the first round. These two figures, 20.07% and 11.97%, are the lowest in the history of the Fifth Republic.

As a result, the deputies of the alliance around Macron only won 250 seats when the majority is 289. In any parliamentary system, such a situation would have required a more or less lengthy debate to form a coalition agreement with one or several parties around a program. The situation is common in most European countries, among others.

In 2017, Macron managed to obtain 314 seats through a first robbery of the elected PS (who lost 216 seats) and some of LR (which lost 92 seats). He thought that in 2022 the same scenario could be repeated with LR... Not wanting to accept his failure and propose a true alliance, he preferred and still prefers to pretend that he is in the majority and pick up some elected LR to build that majority. But Macron has the weakest social base and the weakest electoral base in the history of the Fifth Republic.

It is necessary to remember all this to understand the anger and accumulated anger at seeing all the tricks used, through political violence, to impose an antisocial law.



The methods used to approve a reform rejected by the vast majority of the population have further accentuated the rejection of an undemocratic system and a president who, in fact, has usurped its legitimacy. Macron is the first president to try to pass a pension reform without himself having a parliamentary majority. It is also the first to try to sneak its reform through a PLRFSS (Projet de loi rectificative pour le financement de la Sécurité sociale) that allows the use of Article 47.1 that limits debates in the Assembly to 20 days and the entire procedure to 50 days. And it is also the first to pass a law that strongly modifies the conditions of access to retirement using the famous 49.3, which allows to impose a minority bill without a vote [in parliament]. Macron thus wanted to twist the institutions, twist the arm of the deputies to impose a minority project in the Assembly and ultra-minority in the country.

The violence of these manoeuvres is provoking massive anger and anger in the population. More than 1,200 spontaneous demonstrations took place across the country in the days following the use of 49.3. At the center of these mobilizations is anger against an authoritarian government, deaf to the largest mobilization since 1995 and wielding a discourse worthy of George Orwell's novlangue, a "necessary and legitimate reform", "a democratic process", "a law expected by the French". Macron's political isolation keeps him even more in immobility, with the hope, week after week, that all this will pass, that

the popular river will return to its course... So far he has not succeeded, and he himself has added fuel to the fire.

And what multiplies this anger is the sum of anti-democratic institutions and a poorly elected president who wants to impose his will through institutional tricks, the sum of a reform of social injustice for the working classes and growing inflation, especially in food and energy.



*"The police protect us: you see that"*

JERC drawing and text by AKAKU from Tuesday 5 February 2019 cartoon prohibition of the use du LBD 40 prime a la casse taner\*

The only argument left to the government is that of order. The demonstrations are no longer about political debate, about a situation to which the government should respond by addressing the social and political forces that drive it, but only about public order, and the weapon of police repression becomes the only political response, with the attempt to stifle the movement with batons, tear gas and rubber bullets.

Macron and Darmanin, the interior minister, now present themselves as the defenders of order, facing a civil war led by far-left factionalists. The last few days, after the use of 49.3 and the rejection of the motion of censure, have witnessed an avalanche of police violence, arbitrary arrests and bans on demonstrations called by the big unions. Obviously, the goal is to break the movement. The teachers' union, the French lawyers' union and the League for Human Rights have warned against the use of public force to obstruct demonstrations and intimidate people, and against police violence, in particular that perpetrated by the

BRAV-M (brigades for the repression of violent motorized action) in Paris, a sad repetition of the voltigeurs created by Raymond Marcellin after May 68, responsible for the death of Malik Oussekine in 1986. Protesters have been maimed as a result of police violence: in Rouen, a hospital worker lost a finger and in Paris a Sud Rail activist lost an eye when he was shot with tear gas grenades.

This position of the government to criminalize the movement applies while the day of mobilization on Thursday, March 23 saw, in many cities, the largest demonstrations since the beginning of the movement, bringing together nationwide 3.5 million people according to the unions (1.08 million according to the police), that is, a number equivalent to the great day of mobilization of January 19, with even greater determination and combativeness. The medium-sized cities, in particular, experienced impressive demonstrations: 40,000 in Nantes, 30,000 in Brest, 20,000 in Avignon, along with the 800,000 people present in Paris. On March 23, the mobilization of student youth in institutes and universities also began, with more than 80 universities blocked and 400 institutes and 150,000 young people counted by the UNEF in the Paris demonstration. Young people are the first targets of police violence, which aims to nip in the bud the spread of strikes and blockades.



Well, you  
already have  
it, your Republic is underway!!!



Perpignan, 23 Mars

Macron, in his televised speech, also managed to arouse the anger even of the union leaderships, CFDT and CGT at the head. Directly attacking Laurent Berger, the leader of the CFDT, Macron did not hesitate to claim that Berger had never put forward the slightest proposal on pension financing. In return, Berger and Martinez dedicated sharp comments of "contempt, lies and denial" to him, all unusual terms for union leaders. Especially since Macron explicitly asked the union leaders to come to see him to move forward and accept the application of the law against pensions.

In Paris and several cities, altercations with police occurred mainly at night demonstrations that brought together young people unaccustomed to demonstrations and even less to clashes. To consider these demonstrations as the work of the *black bloc* and the extreme left is obviously a matter of political calculation, but it has nothing to do with reality.

Along with the street mobilizations, the blockades and the entry of young people into the movement, strike movements continue: on March 23, strike rates among SNCF drivers, teachers (50% of strikers), in the energy sector had increased sharply and reconductibles continued in the SNCF, in the oil refineries, ports and docks and, also, in the collection and storage of waste.

This Saturday 25, there have also been clashes with the government in the large demonstration against the mega-dams in Sainte Soline that brought together 30,000 people and faced violent police charges with more than 200 injured (some seriously).

At the end of this stage of the movement, the struggle continues with contradictory elements. Some sectors on strike, particularly waste and refineries, and the multiple demonstrations in the cities maintain the political climate of confrontation with the government. Similarly, lockdowns of colleges and universities may also create a new climate in the coming days. At the same time, there are no new strike movements in important sectors.

Macron and his government remain bogged down and, despite their poses, cannot turn the page on this conflict. In addition, they are looking for a way out also in terms of parliamentary base, seeking to "expand the majority", that is, in fact to create one, without political agreement with The Republicans but seeking to rely on the crisis of the Republicans, divided between support and opposition to Macron.

The inter-union continues to resist, with the demand for the withdrawal of the law and a new strike call for Tuesday, March 28. But, at the same time, it already contemplates the



possibility of participating in the long process of the referendum of shared initiative launched by the elected representatives of the left. Raising this perspective now obviously does not correspond to the strengthening of the balance of forces in strikes and in the streets. Everyone feels that the government is weakened, isolated, that the situation of the working classes facing the rising cost of living and pension reform is a source of strength that can force Macron to reverse his reform.



© Ludovic Daim/MAXPPP – 18/10/2010 – ROANNE – LOIRE – FRANCE – 2,600 people, according to police, 25,000, according to unions, demonstrated in the rain on Saturday morning in the streets of the city against the pension reform.

The cancellation of Carlos III's visit is, in fact, a slap in the face for the government, which demonstrates its inability to stop popular mobilization. However, in the current situation, what is missing is the construction at the national level and in the cities of a common social and political front carrying an anti-capitalist alternative of social and financial options in favor of the working classes, with a different distribution of wealth, a front that relies on social dynamics to pose as a direct political actor in the current situation. Although the movement has not seen the development of structures of self-organization or massive general assemblies of strikers, tens of thousands of militants of the social and political movement guarantee in hundreds of cities the continuity of the movement against the reform, through strikes and blockades, relying on the existence of a national inter-union. It is these sectors that energize this movement, they are the ones who have built it and kept it going until today. Maintaining mobilization in unity and radicalism will be, once again, the challenge of the coming days.

Note from La Pluma:

\*Casse Taner: pun, casse (scrapping of carts). This word refers to Christophe Castaner (1966), socialist turned macronist, was Minister of Interior from 2018 to 2020

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*Original Face à la colère sociale, Macron replace la légitimité par la matraque*

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