Macron advocates austerity, law-and-order and militarism in French elections

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French presidential candidate Emmanuel Macron of *En Marche* outlined key measures in his program, which he will unveil at the end of February, this Saturday in Lyon. He is proposing deep austerity, dismantling the Social Security system, draconian police state measures and close collaboration with Germany on moves to further militarise the European Union (EU).

Portraying himself as "neither left nor right" and claiming that politics is now only a battle between progressives and conservatives, he asked: "I do not say that right and left don't exist anymore. But in historic moments, can't we get beyond such divisions?"

Trying to convince both right-wing and Socialist Party (PS) voters to back him, Macron praised former French presidents of all political stripes: "To be moved by [PS President] François Mitterrand's speech on Europe a few weeks before his death, did one have to be left-wing? To feel pride at Jacques Chirac's speech at the Vel d'Hiv, did one have to be right-wing? … No! One had to be French!" He also cited Philippe Séguin, the mentor of right-wing Les Républicains (LR) presidential candidate François Fillon.

After occupying key posts, including senior adviser to PS President François Hollande and then economy minister—where he helped design the Responsibility Pact deregulation package—Macron left the government last summer. He formed *En Marche*, his electoral movement, in November . While making nationalist appeals to discontent among youth, workers and middle class people disillusioned with the traditional ruling parties, PS and LR, he speaks unabashedly for big business. Should he win the election, he would seek to continue the policies of PS and LR governments.

The French presidential campaign is dominated by escalating conflicts between the major powers and the deep crisis of European and world capitalism. After the Brexit vote and the election of Trump, tensions are exploding inside the trans-Atlantic alliance, as Trump attacks the EU and backs the National Front (FN) in France and similar neo-fascist forces across Europe. Trump's economic nationalism, his overt hostility to German economic strength, and his war threats against China and the Middle East are all pushing the European ruling class to reconsider its alliances.

As US-EU conflict intensifies, Macron proposed in Lyon to boost ties with Germany. Criticizing Trump's anti-immigrant policies, he said, "There will be no wall in my program."

In Lyon, Macron called for an increase of defense spending from 1.6 to 2 percent of France's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), that is, a €9 billion increase each year. "I want a more European defense, with partnerships between Germany and France," he said.

He added, "If we live in dangerous times, it is because the international context itself is dangerous." He branded Russia, Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia as rising authoritarian regimes, declaring: "We must in this context hold our rank, know our history and its guiding logic."

Macron aims to place the burden of stepped-up military spending and war planning squarely on the backs of the working class. He proposes to slash labor costs, social spending and business regulations, claiming this will simplify business creation and boost France's economy.

Macron wants an even harsher labor law than the one Hollande rammed through parliament last year, in the face of mass protests and overwhelming popular opposition. He intends to impose drastic reductions in the contributions to social spending employers pay on workers' wages in order to move France towards a

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situation where workers will have no social or health protections.

He said, “I want labor to be cheaper, by cutting employers tax rates on jobs paying up to 2.5 times the minimum wage, and a 10 percent cut in taxes at the minimum wage.”

Macron tries to justify this policy by claiming that will boost workers’ purchasing power. His measures will only force workers to take private health insurance, however, and leave workers with ever smaller unemployment benefits if they are sacked. “To liberate labor, I want it to be better paid,” he said. “We should re-finance health care and unemployment to cut payments made by workers. Then everyone will have more purchasing power.”

Macron is also proposing a few token measures to cover up his right-wing program, posing as a friend of education. He claimed he wants to increase teachers’ salaries, especially those working in disadvantaged “priority” zones. “I want us to be able to halve the number of students per class in our schools. In primary schools, in all priority education zones, I will pay teachers who are going there much better. They will have more autonomy to carry out their projects.”

He promised to give every young person €500 when they reach the legal age of adulthood, as a “youth pass” to spend on cultural activities.

Insofar as Macron’s entire program is aimed at slashing social spending and workers’ legal rights, his proposals for minor handouts and wage increases to a few select categories of workers and his pose of concern for education and youth development are a reactionary farce.

Aware that his program is no different and no more popular than the policies he helped formulate under Hollande, who became the most unpopular president in French history, Macron also proposes law-and-order measures handing extraordinary powers to police and intelligence services. He has pledged to recruit 10,000 police in the next five years, adding, “We will reorganize our intelligence services, for a more efficient and omnipresent territorial intelligence presence. We will recreate a police service that is effective for daily security.”

Macron’s candidacy has come to the fore particularly after Fillon, the LR candidate, was staggered by accusations that he organized the provision of fictitious jobs paying nearly €1 million in public money to his wife Penelope. According to recent polls, Macron would eliminate Fillon in the first round of April 23 vote, and face neo-fascist National Front leader Marine Le Pen in the May 7 run-off. He is thus at present the favorite to become France’s next president.

Macron expressed his concern over this scandal, fearing that it would further alienate masses of people from LR and the PS and boost the far-right FN as a so-called “anti-system” party.

He warned, “We are living a moment where each day, scandals reveal practices of another time. Be serious in such times, because what is happening in our media and political life is not good for anyone. Because we are struggling to do everything so that what happens will not benefit to the party of the National Front. … Because today, what is emerging in our country is a gangrene on democracy, it is generalized mistrust.”

Macron’s posture as the best opponent of the FN’s rise is a political fraud. His campaign itself intensifies the moods on which the FN is proposing, insofar as Macron has publicly met with and embraced nationalist far-right figures such as Philippe de Villiers.

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