Presidential front-runner Macron pledges to bring back the draft in France

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In a public meeting Saturday in Paris, Emmanuel Macron, the preferred presidential candidate of President François Hollande and of the majority of the ruling Socialist Party (PS), pledged to bring back the draft and accelerate the rearming of the French armed forces. Macron indicated his goal was to prepare the army not only to carry out large-scale foreign wars, but also massive interventions inside France itself.

This statement by the candidate whom polls currently favor to win the presidential election is a warning to workers and youth in France and across the world. It comes barely two weeks after Sweden re-established the draft, openly declaring it was needed to obtain enough troops to combat Russia. After two devastating world wars in the 20th century, the European ruling classes are preparing for a new war between the major powers and a frontal assault on living standards and democratic rights of workers at home.

Macron said, “We have entered an epoch in international relations where war is again a possible outcome of politics.” He demanded that France maintain independent capacities “to conceive, decide upon, and execute” military action.

To prepare for the wars planned by Macron and his supporters in the state machine, the army would mobilize entire age brackets. “Universal national service, in the army and the national *gendarmerie* [paramilitary police] will [include] all young men and women born in the same year, that is, about 600,000 youth per year,” Macron declared. “The period of universal military service will take place in the three years following each person's 18th birthday.”

The fact that Macron justified bringing back the draft by claiming that humanity is entering an epoch of major wars exposes his cynical attempts to provide a “democratic” and “progressive” veneer for his proposal to force people into the army. He stated this would only be for one month: “Each French youth will meet his or her fellow citizens, mix with different social layers and experience the cohesion of the Republic for a month.” However, preparing for major wars would require far more than a month of military service.

Press reports suggested that setting up the draft would require an initial expenditure of €15 billion, and then a regular yearly expenditure of €3 billion, roughly the budget of France's nuclear arsenal. Macron already plans to impose tens of billions in austerity measures. Financing the military rearmament he is planning would entail vicious social attacks against the working class.

As Washington spends $1 trillion on upgrading its nuclear arsenal, and German media discuss how Berlin could get its own nuclear bomb, Macron also insisted on reinforcing French nuclear weapons. “Our strategic deterrent is a critical element of our independence and our strategic autonomy for decision and action,” he said. “We cannot allow it to be weakened.”

Macron indicated a large number of potential targets of military action, both in the Middle East and Eastern Europe. “We cannot stay out of the game,” he said about Syria, where he called for the destruction of the Islamic State (IS) militia. He also raised Russia, declaring that “only firmness and unity among European countries will allow us to maintain the open dialog with Russia that is necessary.”

One of the most important targets of Macron's military build-up would be the French population itself, and above all the working class. He proposed to create “a center of planning and operations dedicated to internal operations,” connecting different ministries (including defense, the interior, and foreign affairs) involved in military operations inside France, and a

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pooling of data of France's different intelligence services.

This would supplement the existing state of emergency imposed by the PS, which it has already seized upon as a pretext to justify brutal repression of mass protests of youth and workers last year, against the PS' socially regressive labor law. European Union (EU) strategists do not hesitate to cite the repression of the class struggle as the central goal of their interior military planning.

In 2014, reviewing a book published by the EU Institute for Security Studies titled “Perspectives for European Defense 2020,” German radio *Deutschlandfunk* wrote that, “Within the framework of the joint foreign and security policy, the responsibilities of the police and armed forces are increasingly being merged, and the capacities to tackle social protest built up. … [U]nder article 222 of the Lisbon Treaty, a legal basis has been created for the deployment of military and paramilitary units within EU states in crisis.”

One of the authors of the book, Professor Tomas Ries, wrote that the main menace to European security was the “conflict of unequal socio-economic classes in world society.”

Macron's proposals testify to the bankruptcy of capitalism on a global scale. In one country after another, the financial aristocracy is concluding that it needs more cannon fodder to profit from the massive plundering that it foresees would emerge from wars that would involve millions or tens of millions of soldiers at the European level. After the announcement of the massive re-militarization of Germany in 2014, Washington also announced a 10 percent increase of its gargantuan military budget after the election of Donald Trump.

By carrying out the military escalation proposed by Macron, Paris would itself become a driving force in the downward spiral leading, as in 1914 or 1939, towards world war. If France begins to prepare a major military mobilization of its population, this will only step up pressure on other countries in Europe and beyond to do the same.

The draft and the arms race Macron is calling for are not simply the product of NATO's massive troop deployments along Russia's western borders under Obama and Hollande, who admitted in 2015 that there was a danger of “total war” between NATO and Russia.

Relations between the major powers are the most unstable than they have been since World War II. Germany, which Macron wants to make France's major ally, is being threatened with trade war by Trump, who is also threatening North Korea and so implicitly its neighbor, China, with war.

No one asked Macron how many millions or billions of people would die in the wars between the world's major nuclear powers into which Paris is preparing to send France's youth. How would the death rates suffered by these youth compare with those suffered by the European generations that fought and died at Verdun during World War I, or Stalingrad during World War II?

Macron's statement also underscores the dead end of the French presidential election, in which the population is faced with the choice between neo-fascist candidate Marine Le Pen and a series of reactionary Gaullist or PS-linked candidates like Macron. This choice is no choice at all. France under Macron—constantly ready for war, and monitored by a dense network of cops, special forces, spies, and stool pigeons—would be all but indistinguishable from the standpoint of broad masses of workers from a neo-fascist state run by Le Pen.

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