

French President Macron names right-wing PM, meets Merkel to plan austerity and war

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The day after his inauguration at the Elysée palace, French President Emmanuel Macron chose a right-wing graduate of the elite National Administration School (ENA) as prime minister, before flying to Berlin to meet with German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

The friendly meeting between Macron and Merkel in Berlin underscores that his installation in the Elysée is part of a social counterrevolution and surge of militarism spreading across Europe. Berlin, the champion of austerity, which in 2014 broke with seven decades of military restraint following the defeat of the Nazi regime and launched the remilitarization of its foreign policy, hailed Macron, a supporter of deep austerity and a return of the draft.

Macron plans to use the labor law of his predecessor François Hollande, rammed through the National Assembly without a vote in the face of mass protests and the opposition of 70 percent of the French people, to tear up contracts and social benefits by decree.

He began his joint press conference with Merkel by insisting that austerity was not being dictated to him by the European Union or Germany, but was the policy of his government. “The French agenda will be a reform agenda in the coming months, not because Europe is asking us, but because that is what France needs,” he said.

He proposed very close collaboration with Berlin to “work together on a common road map for the European Union and the euro zone.” He added, “These are subjects of the greatest importance... I will be a frank, direct and constructive partner because I think that the success of our two countries is intimately linked.”

Merkel sought to give the greatest possible support, in words at least, to the new French president. “I have full confidence in him, he knows what he has to do,”

she said, referring to France’s social and economic policy.

She also said that Berlin could consider revising the treaties on the structure of the EU in order to give Macron more room for maneuver, both in political and budgetary terms. She said that “from a German point of view, it is possible to change [the treaties] if it is done reasonably.” She continued: “We are in favor of changing the treaties if the result is to reinforce the euro zone. I have always felt troubled when I heard claims that the Lisbon treaty is perfect.”

“There will be no taboos,” Macron said on the issue of revising EU treaties.

However, the idea of revising these treaties in the interests of his government is little more than a political mirage, pointed to by Macron in order to give his austerity policies, which continue and intensify those of his discredited predecessor François Hollande, a false air of novelty.

Influential voices in Berlin, starting with Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble, spoke up to explain that Macron could never carry out such a policy. In an interview with France’s right-wing daily *Le Figaro*, he bluntly dismissed Macron’s proposals as “not realistic.” According to Schäuble, “These propositions, such as a budget for the euro zone, require a modification of the EU treaties [that] would require the unanimity of the 27 member states,” as well as referendums in many of these countries.

While Macron was in Berlin, Edouard Philippe was on the 8pm TV news on TF1 to introduce himself to the French people and lay out the social attacks he is preparing. Concerning Macron’s plans to impose social cuts by decree, he said: “The president of the Republic has committed his authority to this proposal. He explained that it is indispensable to transform the

framework of labor legislation. It is very heavy, very complex. It does not protect workers well. We cannot be inactive.”

As a student at the Political Sciences School (*Sciences-Po*), Philippe briefly joined Hollande’s Socialist Party (PS) to support Michel Rocard before joining the right and supporting Alain Juppé. From 2007 to 2010, he worked in French imperialism’s neocolonial operations in Africa with nuclear energy giant Areva.

Due to this background, he felt the need to insist that he was a “man of the right” who defends a strong and repressive state, stressing his “strong conviction that the state has a role to play and that the state’s authority must be defended.” This is yet another signal that Macron intends to maintain and develop the police mobilization set up by the PS under the state of emergency, which suspends basic democratic rights in France.

Macron’s installation of Philippe as prime minister and his close ties to Merkel underscore the bankruptcy of arguments that voters were morally obligated to vote for Macron against the neo-fascist Marine Le Pen in order to oppose nationalism, dictatorship and militarism. Not only did the media and the traditional parties of government call for a Macron vote, but forces such as Jean-Luc Mélenchon of Unsubmissive France and the New Anti-capitalist Party let it be known that they “understood” the justifications being advanced for a Macron vote.

This has now produced a profoundly reactionary government that is leading the entire bourgeois political setup in a shift far to the right. Not only are Paris and Berlin coordinating a violently antisocial austerity policy, but they are collaborating closely on attempts to use the EU as a framework to develop an aggressive militaristic foreign policy for European imperialism.

Macron’s calls for a return of the draft and for stepped-up military operations are of a piece with moves of the German ruling elite to relegitimize militarism and war in the aftermath of the 2014 shift in Berlin’s foreign policy. Despite the deep divisions between them, the European powers, faced with the challenge from Brexit and the nationalistic policy of the Trump administration, are seeking to band together to more aggressively conduct military interventions.

As the Macron-Merkel meeting took place in Berlin,

EU foreign ministers met in Brussels for a meeting devoted to coordinating the EU’s military and foreign policy, particularly in Africa. EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini raised a broad range of subjects, including intervention in the Horn of Africa as well as in southern Libya to halt the flow of refugees across the Mediterranean.

The attempt to unify the EU on the basis of imperialist interventions overseas, backed by the draft, is reactionary and will encounter broad opposition among European youth and workers. It will only exacerbate already explosive social tensions in Europe.

Even if Berlin allowed Paris to carry out a superficial remodeling of the EU treaties in its interests, this would not benefit the working class. It would be done on the basis of a common agreement among all the EU governments on austerity—the essential framework of European social policy since the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union a quarter century ago. This policy has devastated large parts of Eastern and Southern Europe, most notoriously Greece, since the 2008 Wall Street crash.

The way forward, as the *Parti de l’égalité socialiste* stressed in its call for an active boycott of the second round of the presidential election between Macron and Le Pen, is an independent and internationalist mobilization of the working class against French and European capitalism. There is deep and growing opposition to austerity and militarism in France, Germany and across Europe, and Macron’s attempts to dictate austerity will face broad resistance.



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