

# After Manchester attack, France prolongs state of emergency

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On Wednesday, newly-elected President Emmanuel Macron's administration seized on the May 22 terror attack in Manchester to announce the prolongation of France's state of emergency, imposed after the 2015 Paris attacks, through November 1. Prime Minister Edouard Philippe announced the move after a Defense Council meeting at the Elysée presidential palace. The state of emergency was supposed to lapse on July 15.

Since Macron's inauguration on May 17, his administration was looking for a way to prolong the state of emergency. Such a measure had been discussed during the presidential election, especially after the attack that killed a police officer on the Champs-Élysées, three days before the first round. "We are in a state of emergency that will not be lifted for a long time," declared right-wing candidate François Fillon, whom Macron did not contradict. Fillon went on to call for a Macron vote in the second round.

"This extension will be limited to the time needed to examine a bill to inscribe in legislation the last measures to reinforce the existing legal arsenal," Philippe said Wednesday. That is, the state of emergency and its suspension of fundamental democratic rights will be replaced by permanent measures of the same kind, which will be inscribed in the constitution or in law, so the state can use them routinely and permanently.

The government also announced the creation of a "task force" answerable to the president, which Macron repeatedly said was one of his key "security" policies during the campaign. This is a type of permanent general staff inside the executive, with unspecified powers, and including dozens of members from the intelligence services, the police and the army, whose stated task will be to "coordinate the security and intelligence services."

Over the past year and a half, it has become abundantly clear that the state of emergency is aimed mainly at social opposition to government austerity policies, particularly the anti-worker labor law of previous Socialist Party (PS) President François Hollande. The state of emergency has given police vast powers that it used to brutally repress the resistance of workers and youth and to impose the labor law. The Macron government is pledged to impose deep "structural" reforms amounting to a social counterrevolution. It is expecting broad and strong opposition from the workers.

Macron announced Tuesday one of his government's main measures, the strengthening of the labor law, was to be imposed by decree in the coming weeks. These measures will give more power to employers, dividing workers by negotiating contracts at the level of individual firms, and undermining social rights gained over decades of struggle, including against fascism during the Nazi Occupation and the Vichy regime. The trade unions will have broad powers to determine the scope of these changes.

Macron is leading a government with an extremely narrow social base, which is terrified of a sudden shift in public opinion against it. Many of those who voted for Macron did so only to prevent his opponent, neo-fascist candidate Marine Le Pen, from coming to power. His much-vaunted "moralization of public life" is already under fire, after the satirical weekly *Le Canard enchaîné* reported yesterday on financial deals made by Territorial Cohesion Minister Richard Ferrand.

The government was rapidly placed on the defensive, with its spokespeople declaring that the actions of Ferrand, who as general director of insurance policies in Brittany oversaw real estate transactions favorable to

his family, were “not illegal.” *Le Parisien* cited government spokesman Christophe Castaner as saying: “Ferrand is worried of the ‘incorrect reading’ that would be made of the story before it was published.”

To carry out its attacks, the Macron government is relying essentially on the security forces and the trade unions. The meetings he organized with trade union leaders on Tuesday at the Elysée presidential palace showed he can rely on them. The Stalinist General Confederation of Labor (CGT), the PS-linked French Democratic Labor Confederation (CFDT) and Workers Force (FO) all signaled they would not oppose his plans. The unions tacitly accepted that Macron would impose his policies by decree.

“I believe that he is in agreement with me on the time table for talks. ... This is a pretty good thing, because that will allow us to continue the debate we had last year” on the PS labor law, said CGT leader Philippe Martinez after his meeting with Macron. He added, “Going onto the streets? ... We will be there when schools open and the protest season starts,” that is, once the decrees have been passed.

“Everything depends on the way Emmanuel Macron goes about making his decrees. The CFDT hopes that the legislative phase, whatever its form, will be preceded by a dialogue phase,” CFDT Assistant Secretary-General Véronique Descacq told France Inter radio.

FO General Secretary Jean-Claude Mailly declared, “There will be negotiations this summer, but one doesn’t solve certain problems in three meetings ... or else everything gets blocked. I do not have the feeling that the president wants a blockage.” Mailly added, “I felt that, a priori, he has room for maneuver.” Mailly in fact has close ties to the new government, as Labor Minister Muriel Pénicaud recruited Stéphane Lardy, a former close aide to Mailly, as an advisor.

In exchange, one of Macron’s plans for the trade unions is to have them funded directly and openly by the employers. In his book *Revolution*, he speaks of a “clear financing mechanism, where workers orient financial resources provided by the firm to the trade union of their choice.” This measure goes essentially in the same direction as the plan of Marine Le Pen, inspired by Vichy-era practices, of having the trade unions financed directly by the state.

With the complicity of the trade union bureaucracies,

the Macron government is preparing unprecedented attacks on the working class, first with the state of emergency and then by attacking fundamental constitutional rights like the right to strike, to protest, to free movement, and free expression, including proposals to censor the internet.



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