

Macron announces cuts to French social programs

Francis Dubois
7 September 2017

Three days before its presentation of decrees to destroy the labor code on August 31, Prime Minister Edouard Philippe announced a series of measures to complete his break with what remains of the “French social model”. Under the pretext of “modernizing” social welfare systems, the government of French President Emanuel Macron is setting out to destroy all the social rights the working class gained in struggle during the 20th century.

These measures are presented as “revamping”, but in fact aim to liquidate the main social insurance and aid systems in their current form. “This is only the beginning”, Edouard Philippe had said as he presented the Labor Code decrees.

Encouraged by the support of the trade unions for its decrees but also pressed by an unpopularity that grows day by day, the government wants to attack unemployment insurance, vocational training, housing aids and medical insurance this month, before tackling pensions. The list is not exhaustive; the Medef (the French Employers Association) has already indicated that it wants to smash the SMIC (minimum wage). The method, already used against the Labor Code, remains the same: close collaboration with the trade unions to impose austerity.

Under the pretext of raising workers’ purchasing power, the government wants to eliminate unemployment contributions and replace them with a smaller increase in a separate tax paid by the population, not the employers. The ultimate goal is to eliminate the unemployment insurance system and exempt employers from any financial responsibility.

The government is pledging “drastic” oversight of the unemployed. They will lose their allowances if they refuse a job and will have to accept increasingly precarious and poorly paid jobs.

This is also a way of creating a low-wage sector, as in Germany with the Hartz laws, aiming to undermine social rights and create a broad mass of “working poor”.

The model, according to *Marianne* magazine, recalls “the English system and its ‘Job centers’ [set up under Margaret Thatcher] where the unemployed person has no choice but to accept what is proposed to him, the level of salary, qualifications or geographical location of the position, at the risk of losing his allowances immediately.”

Vocational training is to be treated in the same way. Joint funding between workers and employers must also be replaced and resources must be directly controlled by the State, aiming to become a source of profit. According to *Le Monde* a commission will ensure a “return on investment of vocational training funds.”

Under the pretext of bringing the unemployed back into jobs, the government aims to eliminate stable and comprehensive training for decent jobs and replace it with constant “bits” of training, taken between precarious jobs in various industries and depending on the bosses’ immediate needs.

Similarly, the government also announced a “rethinking” of pensions for the beginning of 2018. Under the false pretext of “simplifying” and “democratizing”, it would merge 37 pension schemes into a single one, so that all French people have the same, bargain-basement pension “regardless of their status and career path”.

The example of Britain again shows what the government has in mind. Everyone gets the same low pension, and those who want more must subscribe to private pensions sold by investment funds and insurance companies.

The medical insurance system is also being targeted. Last week, the Minister of Economy and Finance, Bruno Le Maire, announced a series of privatizations, which will submit social services to the profit motive, and disrupt and deregulate critical social or industrial sectors such as the supply of water or public transport, with disastrous consequences for the population.

Despite the technocratic jargon used by the government to define its projects, its policy is clear: it is embarking on a campaign to destroy all of the social gains of the working class for the benefit of the super-rich. This policy is clearly illustrated by the reform of the ISF (Wealth Tax). This project “is expected to reduce income from the wealth tax by three-quarters. A gift that will benefit especially the wealthiest amongst the wealthy”, says *Le Monde*.

Macron’s policy is fundamentally illegitimate and undemocratic. He planned his destruction of the Labor Code with the Medef and the trade unions and imposed it, despite the fact that nearly two-thirds of the French people are against it, thanks to decrees that bypass the parliament.

To impose this policy of social destruction, the financial oligarchy is planning permanent and generalized repression of the population. That is why the other priority of the government is a “second emergency parliamentary session” on 25 September for a new “anti-terror law”, i.e., moving the key repressive measures of the state of emergency into common law.

The state of emergency, imposed by the Socialist Party (PS) government of François Hollande and extended by Macron until his new law comes into force, is primarily directed against the working class. Its purpose was fully demonstrated during the repression of anti-labor law protests in July 2016. The main targets of the state of emergency are the fundamental democratic rights of the working class, rights acquired and defended during long struggles, including the bloody fight against the Nazi occupation and the collaborationist regime of Vichy.

It is also now proven that terrorist attacks in Europe over the last two years have been carried out by networks of Islamist fighters mobilized by Western intelligence agencies in their war to overthrow the Syrian regime of President Bashar al-Assad. The terrorists traveled under the protection of the intelligence services, who saw them as critical foreign

policy tools. It is established, among other things, that the Belgian State had prior knowledge of the Brussels bombings in March 2016 and knew where to find its perpetrators.

Just as Trump represents the interests of the American financial oligarchy, Macron wants to impose the diktat of the French financial aristocracy against the workers. The similarity of slogans is not a coincidence. Where Trump speaks of “making America great again”, the Macron government says “France is back” or that “we must make France stronger.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)