

French President Macron signs labor decrees, trampling on social opposition

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Despite mass popular opposition and growing strikes and protests, French President Emmanuel Macron signed decrees destroying the country's Labor Code yesterday. His government has also announced deep cuts to health, education, and unemployment insurance, while promising to spend billions of euros more on the army and cut taxes on the rich (ISF).

On live television, flanked by Labor Minister Muriel Pénicaud and government spokesman Christophe Castaner, Macron signed five decrees modifying the Labor Code after a meeting of the cabinet yesterday. The first measures are to be published in the legislative record starting tomorrow. Macron declared, "This reform will go into effect immediately upon publication. The first reforms will be in effect in a matter of days."

He added that he would sign "maybe 20 or so decrees" before the end of the year, and that "all the reforms contained in these decrees" would go into effect "at the latest by January 1."

This action underscores the contempt of Macron and of the entire financial aristocracy he represents for mass popular opposition to austerity across Europe. Macron's approval ratings have fallen to 30 percent in the four months since his election, and 70 percent of French people opposed last year's reforms of labor law on which Macron is building.

Macron is arrogantly imposing his diktat on the population via the state machine, which functions against the wishes of the people. While the September 12 union protest was being prepared, Macron declared in New York that "democracy does not happen in the street." He insulted demonstrators opposed to the law as "lazy" and "cynical."

Macron, the banks and the rest of big business in France are determined to destroy all the social rights

won by the working class in the 20th century. Those gains were the products of international struggle. France's Labor Code, passed in 1905, was the immediate product of European strikes that erupted in the wake of the Russian Revolution that year. The October Revolution of 1917, which terrified the ruling class everywhere, was more responsible than any other single event for improvements in the conditions of the working class.

By destroying the traditional framework of class relations in France, Macron's decrees have set the stage for an intensification of the class struggle. Workers will only be able to defend themselves by building new organizations of struggle to replace the unions, which have been transformed into instruments for strangling workers' resistance, and by constructing a new revolutionary leadership of the working class.

Macron's decrees allow employers to impose workplace votes to blackmail workers into accepting sackings and cuts to wages and benefits. If workers refuse these demands, employers will be able to shut down factories, sack workers refusing the proposed agreements and cancel their rights to job re-training at Unemployment Centers.

Bosses will be authorized to hire workers on so-called "project" contracts, which are indefinite temp contracts. These will be regulated at the industry level in terms of how long and how many times workers can be hired on such contracts. Employers will be legally allowed to break "project" contracts once a project is done, without paying any severance pay.

Small businesses will be able to change established rules on pay and bonuses through these votes.

Employers will also be authorized to impose firm-level contracts that violate the Labor Code, industrial-level agreements and previously signed contracts, all of

which would be a dead letter.

The Macron government and the international bourgeoisie are watching nervously as anger develops in the working class. Yesterday, Transport Minister Élisabeth Borne called in truckers' unions to offer empty reassurances that the reforms should be “no cause for worry,” in an attempt to shut down the drivers' strike and keep roads and gas stations open.

The ruling class is counting on the complicity of the trade unions, who are seeking to divide struggles against the law into a number of separate, rolling one-day strikes to exhaust opposition to Macron. They met the new president after his election to go over the schedule of his reform agenda. They then negotiated the labor decrees for weeks with Pénicaud and the employers organizations.

According to *Le Canard enchaîné*, two secret meetings took place between Macron, Pénicaud, and top officials of the CFDT (French Democratic Confederation of Labor) and FO (Workers' Force) unions. The weekly reported that Macron wanted to make sure the unions “had their members under control.”

Le Monde reported that discussions between union officials and the government are “cordial” and Pénicaud is “very enthusiastic” about plans to fund training for union officials—one of the main avenues Macron's decrees use to funnel corporate money into the unions' coffers. The unions will then seek to impose on the workers the agreements they have arranged with the bosses and the government.

The aim of Macron's reforms is to increase the profitability of the second-largest economy in the European Union (EU), above all to make it possible for France and Europe to rival the United States—including militarily—in the wars now being prepared.

A few days before publishing his decrees, Macron told an assembly of ambassadors, “My ambition is for our armies to demonstrate themselves, in terms of quality, capacity for deployment, and speed ... as among the very best in the world, the best in Europe, to protect France, but also our continent. We have forgotten that the last 70 years of peace on the European continent are an aberration of our collective history. But the threat is on our doorstep, and war is on our continent.”

Amid the collapse of the post-war international order and of the world hegemony of the United States,

brought to a head by the actions of the Donald Trump administration, tensions are exploding between Washington and the EU. Trump's barbaric threats of nuclear genocide against North Korea are driving the European bourgeoisies to build up their military forces to prepare their own imperialist wars. They are determined to put the cost of this military build-up squarely on the backs of the working class.

The billions of euros saved by slashing workers' social rights are intended to reinforce the armed forces and militarize France, as Macron aims to transfer the extraordinary police powers granted by France's anti-democratic state of emergency directly and permanently into common law.

Faced with the EU austerity diktat and the growing dangers of dictatorship and war, workers in France and across Europe are confronted with the necessity of a political and revolutionary struggle.



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