

French president Macron to end lifetime job guarantee for public sector workers

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5 February 2018

On Thursday, French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe and Public Finances Minister Gerald Darmanin announced a sweeping attack on public sector workers aimed at scrapping the legal statute of public sector workers' rights established after the liberation from Nazi occupation.

“This plan aims to shatter to pieces the last taboos surrounding public sector workers and also marks the end of the dogma of life-time employment guarantees, upon hiring, for all public sector workers,” wrote the right-wing daily *Le Figaro*. The two ministers stated that the attacks would not apply to the police and intelligence forces, the military or the top ranks of the state bureaucracy, but to the mass of public sector workers.

They are directly targeting the roughly 4 million workers who have public sector status in France. Though eroded by attacks under Socialist Party and right-wing governments alike, the “statute” governing their working conditions has still formally guaranteed fundamental rights including lifetime employment, guaranteed base pay, regular promotion and regular wage increases.

It also grants vacations and easier conditions for retirement or early retirement without penalties. Only 10 years ago, public sector workers still retired three years earlier than private sector workers. They also had a guaranteed right to strike and to join political and trade union organizations.

The measures announced by Philippe and Darmanin include a massive resort to “contract workers,” who will replace public sector workers but be denied the rights of the public service. At the same time, a plan for an essentially unlimited number of “voluntary departures” aims to sack tens of thousands of workers who will have to find jobs in the private sector. This

will allow the state to cut public-sector wages by €4.5 billion (\$5.6 billion) by 2020.

No economic sector is to be left untouched. Particularly heavily hit will be services earmarked for “reorganization,” including teachers, health care workers, and local services. Until now, public sector job cuts had always been limited to attrition, i.e., to not replacing workers as they retired.

The government also aims to introduce “merit pay,” a poison pill that would eliminate the right to a fixed salary for a specified duration of work. It is to be used as a financial whip against the public-sector workers, to break solidarity among them. For public administrations, including the schools and the hospitals, the government is demanding “indicators of results,” thanks to which it will be possible to measure the “return” produced by the workers (and so, ultimately, their pay), who are thus to be placed under constant pressure.

Another measure that is not widely discussed but actively prepared is the privatization of work carried out by public sector workers and various public enterprises and administrations. These privatizations should occur “wherever the private sector can find its place,” former government spokesman Christophe Castaner said last May. Thursday, from Tunis, Macron stressed that the public service should “reorganize itself faster, as companies do.”

It is not only the statute of the rail workers that is to be suppressed, for example, but also their retirement plan. Since September, Macron has insisted that the change to the statute of the rail workers should include the suppression of their special pension system.

A wide swath of the social gains introduced after World War II are targeted for destruction. Macron stated Thursday that the statute had to be reformed

since “elements of business practice ... cannot be implemented due to rigidities.”

This confirms the analysis of the WSWS during the brutal attacks of the European Union (EU) in Greece: the European financial aristocracy was taking aim at the basic social gains that workers obtained after the defeat of Nazism in 1945, and that went back ultimately to the 1917 revolution in Russia.

Macron’s attack is part of a broad confrontation of the continent’s ruling elites with the European working class. In Germany, the largest EU economy, a “Grand Coalition” government is being prepared that will carry out massive attacks on the working class to finance the re-militarization of Germany and its return to great-power politics.

Powerful strikes of German metal and auto workers in recent days are for now effectively blocking the installation of a new coalition government of social-democratic and conservative parties, which have presided for years over a vast transfer of wealth from the workers to the super rich. On Saturday, tens of thousands of people protested in London against the attack on the National Health Service by the right-wing, pro-Brexit government. The NHS is another fundamental gain of the working class in Britain, obtained after World War II.

Just as the German unions are aiming mainly to let off steam to avoid a mass movement against the ruling parties, the French unions have no intention of damaging Macron by defending the public-sector workers. The union leaders are aware of the historic magnitude of the attacks, and their reactions of surprise and indignation are utterly hypocritical. They called for a vote for Macron last year, well aware of his plans for an attack on the public sector, which they have been discussing with him since September, just as they had also negotiated with him the attack on the Labor Code.

Their nationalist program of defense of the competitiveness of their “own” bourgeoisie on the world market, sacrificing the workers to this aim, is essentially the same as that of Macron. They are organically opposed to uniting the struggles of the working class internationally.

The statute of the public sector was, with Social Security, one of the major reforms at the Liberation, introduced by the French Communist Party, which used them to justify Stalin’s policy of strangling proletarian

revolution against the discredited fascist bourgeoisies across Europe. Now, the Stalinists, the social democrats and the trade unions are trying, by capitulating to a reactionary governmental cabal led by a free-market president, to definitively destroy it.

A struggle to defend every gain of the working class requires drawing a balance sheet of the bankruptcy of nationally based perspectives, which all lead in the final analysis to collaboration with the capitalist class, and organizing the struggles internationally across Europe independently of the trade unions. The basis of this struggle is a truly socialist and internationalist program for the taking of power of the working class and the building of the United Socialist States of Europe.



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