

Macron and the democracy of class war

Peter Schwarz, Andre Damon
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On Tuesday, French President Emmanuel Macron, the former investment banker, made what the Western press hailed as an impassioned plea for democracy before the European Parliament.

Macron warned of a Europe where “the illiberal fascination grows daily” and “our national egoisms sometimes feel more important than what unites us against the rest of the world.”

“We are seeing authoritarianism all around us,” declared the French President. “The response is not authoritarian democracy but the authority of democracy.” For Macron, the embodiment of this democracy is the European Union, which represents “a unique democratic model in the world,” and “democracy conceived of as freedom.”

The speech elicited an enraptured response from the US, British, and French political establishment, with the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *Financial Times* running lead editorials lionizing Macron.

The *New York Times* compared Macron to a “biblical prophet” manning the barricades to defend “European democracy.”

But if Macron be a biblical prophet, he is clothed in filthy garments.

Just four days before his speech, Macron ordered air strikes against the Syrian cities of Damascus and Homs, on false pretenses, without a parliamentary vote, and over the opposition of most of the French population. The French President carried out his military adventure in the Levant in alliance with Donald Trump, a right-wing and fascist demagogue, and British Prime Minister Theresa May, whose government is consumed with the effort to split Britain from the European Union.

The “prophet” Macron, who received less than a quarter of the vote in the first round of the 2017 French election, has, in his first year of office, inscribed France’s authoritarian state of emergency measures into the country’s constitution, worked to gut social services and launched a frontal attack on France’s public-sector workers and students.

In the week before his speech, Macron oversaw a massive assault by over 3,000 riot police on demonstrators at an environmentalist camp and called for France to “repair” the “bond between the Church and the state” in a sweeping attack on the secular traditions of the French Republic.

And yet it is Macron that the Western press is heralding as the

last best hope for democracy. As the *Washington Post* put it, “French President Emmanuel Macron articulated truths on Tuesday that resonate for the entire globe.”

Absent from both Macron’s speech and its rapturous reception in the press is any attempt to explain *why* the far right is gaining strength throughout Europe, or, just as importantly, why the “liberal” governments of Europe are pursuing policies that are increasingly indistinguishable from those of fascist regimes.

After all, Macron’s key partner in the European Union, Germany, is headed by a grand coalition government that has largely adopted the anti-immigrant platform of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), has called for resurrecting the militarist (and, frankly, fascist) traditions of the German army, and imposed one of the most draconian Internet censorship regimes anywhere in Europe.

Neither Macron nor his panegyrists make any effort to relate the rise of the far-right to the growth of social inequality, the dismantling of the welfare state or the rise of militarism—that is, to the fundamental characteristics of the capitalist system.

In reality, the greatest responsibility for the rise of the extreme right in Europe lies with the anti-working class policies pursued by the European Union on behalf of Europe’s banks and corporations. The EU’s austerity dictates, which Macron supported as an investment banker and was directly implicated in as French finance minister, have resulted in far-right parties winning growing support. The working class does not see the EU as the embodiment of freedom and democracy, but as the ruthless executor of the interests of the super-rich and the banks.

The extreme right can cast themselves as critics of a corrupt establishment and channel social anger in a nationalist direction only because the social democrats, trade unions and pseudo-left parties like Syriza in Greece, the NPA in France and Die Linke in Germany do everything in their power to block the emergence of a genuine movement of the working class and unconditionally support and implement austerity programs.

As a result, the National Front has risen to become the second-largest party in France, the AfD became the first far-right party to enter federal parliament in Germany since World War II, the right-wing extremist Freedom Party assumed government responsibility in Austria, the xenophobic Lega and Five Star Movement hold a parliamentary majority in Italy, and far-right

parties are in power in Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary.

The “reform” of the European Union being sought by Macron under these conditions has nothing to do with democracy, freedom or equality. It aims to transform Europe into a police state and a military great power dominated by France and Germany, able to compete with the United States in the imperialist redivision of the world.

In the run-up to the Second World War, the apologists for Anglo-American capitalism claimed that the fundamental division in the world—and the source of global conflict—was the conflict between “democracy” and “fascism.” But in the 1930s, as now, both the “democratic” and “authoritarian” governments were pressured to pursue essentially the same militarist and authoritarian policies by the global crisis.

No one described this process more clearly than Leon Trotsky, the co-leader of the 1917 October Revolution and the founder of the Fourth International, who argued that workers should have no illusions in the “democratic” pretenses of the capitalists. In his 1939 essay, “Marxism in our Time,” Trotsky wrote:

All attempts to represent the impending war as a clash between the ideas of democracy and fascism belong to the realm either of charlatanism or stupidity. Political forms change, capitalist appetites remain... The furious and hopeless struggle for a new division of the world follows irresistibly from the mortal crisis of the capitalist system.

In language that perfectly describes the combination of military rearmament and social austerity that Macron represents, Trotsky observed:

Mussolini advised the workers of Italy to learn to pull in tighter the belts on their black shirts. But does not substantially the same take place in the imperialist democracies? Butter everywhere is used to grease guns. The workers of France, England, the United States learn to pull in their belts without having black shirts. In the richest country of the world millions of workers have turned into paupers.

He continued,

The uncontrollable deterioration in the living conditions of the workers makes it less and less possible for the bourgeoisie to grant the masses the right of

participation in political life, even within the limited framework of bourgeois parliamentarism. Any other explanation of the manifest process of democracy’s dislodgement by fascism is an idealistic falsification of things as they are, either deception or self-deception.

In a way, the Western press is correct in lionizing Macron as a spokesman of “democracy.” He is in fact the spokesman for *bourgeois* democracy in the epoch of its disintegration—that is, the untrammelled domination of the banks and the corporations.

The world is confronted with two forms of dictatorship, either the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, or the dictatorship of the proletariat—that is, the conquest of power by the working class, the vast majority of the population, and the reorganization of society on the basis of social need.

The working class has shown itself ready to fight against the EU’s drive toward austerity and war. This is demonstrated by the militant struggles of rail workers and students in France, the scale of the strikes in Germany’s industrial sector and public services, the repeated eruption of general strikes in Greece, the reemergence of workers’ struggles in Eastern Europe and many other strikes and protests.

The coming period will be characterized by bitter class battles and mounting opposition to war and state repression. But these struggles require a political perspective. They can be successful only if the working class breaks with the social democrats, trade unions and pseudo-left parties, unites internationally, and combines the struggle against war and austerity with the fight against the capitalist system. Only in this way can the ruling elite’s policies be opposed and the rise of the far right halted.

Leon Trotsky founded the Fourth International in 1938, in the epoch of the rise of fascism. It advanced the struggle against war, inequality and attacks on democratic rights under the banner of revolutionary proletarian socialism, opposing fascism as an integral component of the struggle to overthrow the decadent and obsolete capitalist system.

As the ruling elites seek once again to transform the world into a “foul prison,” as Trotsky put it, workers and youth must again take up the struggle for socialism by building the International Committee of the Fourth International and its sections, the Socialist Equality Parties.



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