

Despite rising social anger, Macron pledges to step up austerity attacks in France

Alex Lantier
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Despite rising social opposition after both houses of parliament voted to privatize the French National Railways (SNCF), French President Emmanuel Macron plans to intensify austerity and develop closer ties with the far right. This is what emerged from Macron's speech to French health insurers in Montpellier on Wednesday and then during a trip to Vendée to meet far-right royalist politician Philippe de Villiers.

Tuesday night, as the National Assembly prepared to vote the SNCF pact, Macron released a video in which he contemptuously denounced social spending. The 40-year-old, transformed by the Rothschild bank into a multimillionaire after a few years of work, made clear he believes the population is lazy and reliant on state aid. "We spend too much money, we let people evade their responsibilities, we are in curing mode," he complained about French health care, while attacking the "crazy amounts of money" France spends on social issues even though "the poor stay poor."

At the same time, polls emerged showing a continuing erosion of Macron's popularity. With only 40 percent approval ratings, Macron has lost the support of 19 percent of the voters who cast ballots for him on the first round of the elections, a group that counted only 16 percent of registered voters. The presidential staff at the Elysée palace commented only, "Our base isn't abandoning us."

In Montpellier on Wednesday, Macron endured catcalls during his speech but nonetheless insisted he would press ahead with social cuts at all costs.

He called for drastic cuts in social spending: "We should not believe that there are some who believe in social transformation and are looking to borrow money, and others who do not believe in it who want to cut spending. There is bad news: social spending, you pay for it, we pay for it."

Macron briefly mentioned mass anger in the French population at social conditions: "We live in a country where democratic promises are often not kept, because we have kept many formal rights that often exist only on paper, and that leads to the contemporary French indignation. And yet we keep spending more of more of our wealth on social issues."

For the millionaire in the Elysée, the solution to this problem is clear. If the French are not properly grateful for their social situation, more cuts should be made to concentrate wealth where the divine right of kings says it should be: at the very top. Macron went on to promise to "liberate" France from what is holding it down, comparing his plans for a "deep revolution" to the creation of Social Security by the National Resistance Council (CNR) in 1945.

Macron's speech was a reaction to growing concern inside his own party about the collapse of his popularity and growing strikes among rail workers, electricity workers and at Air France—and in similar industries not only in France but across Europe. These fears were particularly intense as the rail workers are overwhelmingly opposed to the reform that has been voted by the parliament.

Last week, three Macron advisers—Philippe Aghion, Philippe Martin and Jean Pisani-Ferry—had cynically proposed an attempt to improve Macron's image in a memo that was partially leaked to the press. While detailing stepped-up austerity measures they were proposing against the workers, the three advisers also stressed their concern that Macron "gives the impression of being indifferent to the social question."

Macron's speeches were designed to make clear that there will be neither a change in his policy, nor a cynical PR campaign to try to soften his image. The president's contempt for the French electorate is itself a

sign of a broad movement of the entire ruling class towards the far right, where it no longer even postures as seeking to work out a policy in line with the will of the people.

A revolutionary situation is emerging in France and across Europe. Macron is counting on the trade unions to suppress the continuing strikes against the SNCF reform and other austerity measures. However, he is leaving no room for maneuver or compromise if workers mount a rebellion against the trade union bureaucracy to defend themselves against Macron's attacks. Against such a struggle, Macron is preparing a vast police-state machine inherited from the state of emergency, even if this risks provoking an all-out confrontation with the working class.

As he cynically applauds the Gaullist and Stalinist reforms of the post-1945 era, Macron is very well aware that he aims to destroy them. The Labor Code has been effectively abrogated by the 2016 labor law, which allows employers to violate the Labor Code if they have union approval and which Macron is using to privatize the railways. And more cuts to Social Security, pensions and other basic social programs are being prepared.

These programs were created in their current form by the Gaullist, social democratic and Stalinist forces of the CNR, which pledged that France would be a "social" republic that would organize "the eviction of great economic and financial aristocracies from control over the economy."

Three quarters of a century later, under Macron, the bourgeoisie has openly repudiated the reforms that the CNR implemented at the Liberation from Vichy-Nazi rule, in order to head off a revolutionary struggle of the working class led by the Fourth International. All its state institutions, including the trade union bureaucracies, work to impose austerity and disorganize workers' struggles against austerity.

This vindicates the call advanced by the Socialist Equality Party for the struggle against Macron. The only viable strategy for the workers is to mount a rebellion against the unions, organize independent rank-and-file committees to unify the different ongoing struggles in France and across Europe, and take the road of the struggle for power.

As for Macron, he is developing his ties with the far right. After leaving Montpellier, Macron went to the

Vendée region to visit the royalist de Villiers, the former leader of the Rally for France (RPF) party and operator of the Puy du Fou theme park.

Macron had provoked some hostile comments in the press prior to his election by criticizing the French Revolution and insisting that France needs a king: "There is a void in the democratic process. In French politics, this void is the figure of the King, whose death I think the French people fundamentally did not want."

After having gone to visit the royal tombs at the St. Denis basilica in April, Macron stressed this week his good relations with de Villiers, saying that he had "colorful" discussions with him while adding that de Villiers "does not defend the same values or principles as I do."

Macron adviser Bruno Roger-Petit stressed, however, that the president shares the same basic outlook as the RPF royalist: "He and Macron have the same conception of the vertical nature of the exercise of power." As a summary of Macron's utter contempt for social and democratic rights, there is not much to add.



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