

French President Macron lays out road map for military escalation

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On July 10, before the two houses of parliament assembled at Versailles, Emmanuel Macron announced a major hike in military spending financed by social attacks on the working class. A year after his election, when he was hailed as a defender of democracy against neo-fascist candidate Marine Le Pen, Macron is advancing a far-right policy of militarism, attacks on democratic rights and scrapping basic social gains of the working class.

In the days before his address, the media worried over rising social opposition in the working class. “The patience of the French people has reached its limit,” declared RTL, pointing to an Elabe poll in which 75 percent found Macron’s policy “unjust” and 65 percent found it “ineffective.” On Monday morning, Europe1 bluntly predicted that Macron’s speech would do “little to satisfy public opinion” and pointed to Macron’s “collapse” in the polls. After losing 14 percent support among retirees in another poll, his popularity rating stands at 34 percent.

After another poll found that 55 percent of French people fear falling into poverty, including over 60 percent of working-age people, many parliamentarians did not dare go to Versailles for a speech that cost taxpayers €500,000. A right-wing deputy, Fabien di Filippo, explained his decision to boycott the speech by saying, “It’s just 500,000-euro PR. Out of respect, I am not going.”

Faced with these concerns in ruling circles, Macron made a perfunctory statement of concern, saying, “I know I cannot do everything, I know I do not succeed everywhere,” and then proceeded to stay the course on his vastly unpopular policies.

He briefly pointed to the explosive international context, with spreading Middle East wars and the collapse of relations with Washington, and the danger

of large-scale war. He remarked in passing that French people increasingly “fear big changes, the chaos of the world: tensions with Iran, the trade war launched by the United States, divisions in Europe.”

But the only solution Macron proposed in his speech was to slash social spending and wages in order to arm French imperialism to the teeth for war. He applauded the parliamentarians, saying, “You have given France back its military capacities through a military planning law of new and unprecedented ambition. You have broken the blockage of the labor market created by a Labor Code that has become obsolete and inappropriate.”

From the beginning, Macron linked his attacks on social rights to his militarist plans: “France’s plan for our endangered Europe and for the world ... forces us to be strong. This is why we know we have to strengthen our economy. ... This is why we need a better army, the best possible defense systems.”

Macron reaffirmed his pledge to reintroduce the draft for both young men and young women.

He then explained how French capitalism would attract foreign investment to finance these military plans: by providing international capital with workers reduced to the status of cheap labor. He insisted that education and training programs be adapted to this agenda.

The French president made clear he aims to totally subordinate public and social services to maximizing the profits of the wealthy and to rearming the military. He said, “There is not on the one side economic policy and on the other side social policy. The ... goal is the same: to be stronger so we can be fairer.”

Macron deployed all his arrogance as an ex-Rothschild banker who denounced the “crazy amounts of money” France spends on social benefits, to demand

a deep austerity policy. He said there could be no freeing-up of investment “without a slowing of our continual spending increases,” which requires “strong and courageous choices.” He unabashedly defended the suppression of the tax on the rich, claiming that it “has not created jobs or improved anyone’s conditions at all in France.”

He accompanied this with a law-and-order policy of repression of the workers and youth. He said that “security is the first pillar” of democracy and evoked the mantra of the “war on terror,” claiming that the police, which are broadly hated in working class areas, would be the human face of the state.

He said: “A neighborhood security police will bring back the proximity of the population and the police, who give authority a human face and help overcome the feeling of abandonment that populations undergo when they are subject to laws that are not those of the Republic.” He hailed the police and thanked the parliament for having “started to give new resources to our security forces.”

As the European Union plans a massive escalation of attacks on immigrants, including building a vast network of prison camps to detain them, Macron picked up the neo-fascists’ favorite theme of the struggle against “illegal immigration” in the name of “Republican order.” He vowed to impose “precise rules on those who, for economic reasons, leave their country to come to ours,” and who according to Macron can be denied the right to asylum.

He concluded his speech by claiming that with these policies, “France has the means to become again a power in the 21st century.”

The deputies and senators present greeted Macron’s reactionary speech with thunderous applause and a standing ovation.

A class gulf separates the parliamentarians’ enthusiasm for repressive militarism, which is all but indistinguishable from that of the neo-fascists, from the workers. That force that will emerge as the opposition to the imposition of a militarist and authoritarian regime in France and across Europe will be the working class. To oppose Macron’s austerity program, it will be compelled to carry out a struggle against the drive of all the imperialist powers, France included, towards war.

Macron’s far-right speech, the main lines of which are in fact shared by governments of all political

colorations in all the major EU powers, vindicates the positions taken by the *Parti de l’égalité socialiste* (PES), the French section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, in the 2017 presidential elections.

The PES correctly warned after the first round of the presidential election that Macron was not a lesser evil than the other candidate in the runoff, neo-fascist Marine Le Pen. The call of the PES for an active boycott of the second round, to indicate irreconcilable hostility to both candidates, was the only way to maintain the political independence of the working class and fight to mobilize it in struggle against whatever reactionary candidate won the election.

Pseudo-left forces like the New Anti-capitalist Party and Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who refused to take any clear position opposing Macron, effectively made themselves complicit in his policies. They have allied with the union bureaucracies that have negotiated austerity measures with Macron, including most prominently the privatization of the railways and cuts to railworkers’ wages. They then helped strangle strike action against these attacks.

After a year of Macron’s term in office, what is emerging ever more clearly is the necessity of building an international movement of the working class against militarism and war in order to fight back against Macron’s anti-social agenda.



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