

French ministers resign as Macron government plunges in polls

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After Ecology Minister Nicolas Hulot resigned last week, a second resignation by Sports Minister and former fencing champion Laura Flessel on Tuesday deepened the sense of crisis besetting French President Emmanuel Macron's government. Flessel, whose budget Macron had cut from €530 to €348 million, said she will "continue her struggle by other means," adding that she supported Macron and defended his "values and patriotism." She was the second minister to resign even before Macron's planned reshuffle of his cabinet.

Afterwards, the Macron government announced Hulot's replacement by François de Rugy, the speaker of the National Assembly and former Green, who joined Macron before his election. Swimming champion Roxanna Maracineanu will replace Flessel.

The government also announced Tuesday night, after 10 days of hesitations, that it would introduce on January 1, 2019 tax withholding by private corporations. The decision, which provoked protests from hundreds of thousands of small businesses, was announced after the main French business federation, the Medef, abandoned its opposition.

The government seems adrift, and Macron overtaken by events. The press reported his remarks, at a school visit in Laval, that being president "is not really a job." He added that "some days are easy and some are not." The pro-Macron daily *Le Monde* wrote in an editorial that "every element of optimism that there existed in the message of Macron's candidacy" has been undermined.

Disastrous polls last month had already underscored his government's isolation from the population. An Elabe poll showed that only 16 percent of Frenchmen think his policies help the country, and only 6 percent think his policies help them. After Macron's repeated overtures to Trump, his bombing of Syria and his

reform smashing rail workers' wages and conditions, which was signed by the trade unions, the growing anger with Macron in small business, as well as among workers, leaves Macron with virtually no base of support.

The fairly weak illusions the media promoted after his election that his parliamentary majority, "drawn from civil society," would be "close to the people" and would bring economic dynamism back to France, have disappeared in barely a year.

For small businessmen, peasants and artisans who are struggling, or whose children and employees are facing unemployment, Macron's policies threaten their living standards like those of wage workers. And behind these social layers, anger against Macron is rising particularly among the main target of his policies: the working class.

The collapse of what little support Macron had retained comes amid a broad radicalization of the working class in Europe. This year, after a decade of deep austerity, an initial wave of strikes spread across Europe—mobilizing not only rail and airline workers in France, but teachers and railworkers in Britain, airline and retail workers in Spain, and metalworkers in Turkey and Germany. Already last year, the Generation What poll found that a majority of Europeans under 35, including 62 percent of the under-35 French, wanted to join a "mass uprising."

The way for workers to win over the growing layers of small business opposed to the attacks of the European Union (EU) and of Macron, and to prevent a shift of the middle classes further to the right, is to wage a resolute and uncompromising struggle against their austerity policies. The critical question in this context is to arm the working class with a clear perspective of struggle, on a revolutionary and socialist

basis, against European and international capitalism.

This requires a political break with the bureaucracies of the pseudo-left parties and trade unions who continue to negotiate social austerity with Macron. It is not a question of changing trade union tactics or of imposing on Macron a more supposedly “radical” prime minister like Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who volunteered himself for that role last year. It is a question of reorienting the working class in France and across Europe towards a struggle against the dictatorship of the banks, as took place a century ago in Russia.

As Trotsky wrote in 1934 in *Whither France*, “It is false, thrice false, to affirm that the present petty bourgeoisie is not going to the working class parties because it fears ‘extreme measures.’ Quite the contrary. The lower petty bourgeoisie, its great masses, only see in the working-class parties parliamentary machines. They do not believe in their strength, nor in their capacity to struggle, nor in their readiness this time to conduct the struggle to the end.”

Even 82 years later, the writings of the great revolutionary still shed light on the situation today. If Macron can press on with austerity despite growing strike action, and the neo-fascists win broader sections of middle class and working class voters, it is because masses of people have had devastating experiences with the social-democratic Socialist Party (PS) and the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF). After decades of austerity following the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union, the PS, the PCF and the unions are empty shells, without any working class base.

To stop Macron’s onslaught and block the rise of the neo-fascists, the critical question is to build new organizations of struggle independent of the union bureaucracies, and build the Socialist Equality Party (PES) as the alternative to pseudo-left politicians like Mélenchon.

The first year of Macron’s term has vindicated the warnings made by the PES. Even before the second round of the 2017 presidential elections, the PES denounced the political blackmail of the ruling elite, which demanded that workers vote for Macron to block neo-fascist candidate Marine Le Pen. The PES called for an active boycott of the Macron-Le Pen runoff, to provide a politically independent axis for the coming struggles of workers and youth in the next presidential

term.

The last year also vindicated the PES’ opposition to the pseudo-left parties and trade unions. Whatever their claims to having “radical” politics, they drove these struggles into a dead end. All discussed, negotiated and signed the smashing of rail workers’ wages and conditions in the face of broad opposition, and discussed plans for broad attacks on pensions and health care. Nevertheless, Mélenchon’s Unsubmissive France and the New Anticapitalist Party (NPA) insisted that workers had to struggle within the framework of a “united front” with the unions’ negotiations with Macron.

To carry out a resolute struggle against austerity and militarism requires a break with Mélenchon and the NPA. The PES advanced the policy of building committees of action in the workplaces, factories and working class neighborhoods, to mobilize the entire working class in the coming struggles, and make contact with its natural allies: workers across Europe and beyond.

In this movement, which is heading towards the eruption of a national and European general strike, 50 years after the French general strike of May-June 1968, the PES intervenes to explain the necessity for the transfer of state power to the working class.



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