

Macron impeachment mooted as more French ministers resign

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Two months after the Stalinist General Confederation of Labor (CGT) called an end to strikes against French President Emmanuel Macron's rail privatization plan, ministers are deserting the government. The cabinet and Macron's party, The Republic on the March (LRM), are disintegrating and powerful sections of the bourgeoisie are openly debating mechanisms to remove Macron and build an alternative government.

After the departure of the third highest ranking minister, Ecology Minister Nicolas Hulot, and then of Sports Minister Laurence Flessel, the number two, Interior Minister Gérard Collomb, announced his departure on September 18. He said he would stay on until after the May 2019 European elections.

The press, which also reported the departure of two of Collomb's associates at the Interior Ministry, Jonathan Guémas and Jean-Marie Girier, described Collomb as a minister on life support. *Le Monde* said this strategic ministry is "derelict" and described shocked reactions from high-ranking police officials. "Such self-destructive action is rarely seen. The PR of Gérard Collomb as future candidate for the mayor's office in Lyon has undermined the PR of Gérard Collomb as interior minister."

Several other ministers have announced that they will not stay in the government. Heritage Minister Stéphane Berne only wants to stay on until the end of the year, so as not to be a "marionnette" or a "fig leaf" for the government. He criticised a planned law that provides for "destroying entire neighbourhoods, which are protected, based on the claim they are dilapidated and in poor repair."

Other top-ranking ministers gave the same reasons as Collomb for announcing their departure. Budget Minister Gérald Darmanin plans to run in Turcoing, Man-Woman Equality Minister Marlène Schiappa in

Le Mans, junior minister for Ecology Sébastien Lecornu in Vernon, and both junior minister for digital affairs Mounir Mahjoubi and government spokesman Benjamin Griveaux in Paris. LRM party chief Christophe Castaner plans to run in Marseille. If they intend to be mayors, they will all need to leave within the year.

L'Obs euphemistically noted that "the municipal elections seem to provide certain ministers with a means to justify their departure."

Frédérique Dumas, one of LRM's senior deputies in the National Assembly, slammed the door shut as she left LRM on September 16, saying she has "the feeling of being on the Titanic."

Two months after the unions signed the privatisation of the National Railways (SNCF), it is ever clearer that what Macron won against the rail workers was a Pyrrhic victory. It in fact exposed his government as lacking any social base or democratic legitimacy. According to an Elabe poll last month, only 6 percent of Frenchmen think that Macron's policies improve their lives. This lack of any popular support is intensifying the Macron regime's crisis.

"Macron might as well take out a personal ad saying, 'President looking for a party to defend him,'" *Le Monde* wrote, adding: "Macron's forces, which are supposed to protect the executive, are typically inaudible or even invisible." It cited an LRM official who wrote that "of the 403,000 members the party has on paper, only 70,000 are 'active members' today."

The media are openly concerned about whether Macron can implement his agenda of social cuts, even as the financial aristocracy works to plunder hundreds of billions of euros to finance tax cuts for the rich and a major military build-up. Indeed, the ministers who have resigned are those tasked with critical sectors like the

budget, social security and interior security.

In the context of the Benalla affair, a coalition of parties running from Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Unsubmissive France (LFI) to the neo-fascists and including the right-wing The Republicans (LR) had already effectively destabilised the government.

The Benalla affair underscored that inside the political establishment there is no faction that is more left-wing or less hostile to democratic rights. LFI, LR and the neo-fascists all reacted to the issuing of a video where Macron aide Alexandre Benalla illegally beat peaceful demonstrators in Paris on May Day, not by opposing police brutality against protesters but posing as advocates of police grievances against Macron. Everything points to moves by powerful factions of the bourgeoisie to prepare a palace coup against Macron.

These efforts have redoubled in recent weeks as the Senate compelled Macron aides implicated in the Benalla affair to testify. Benalla, fired by the presidency in the meantime, had denounced the inquiry as "illegitimate" and called Senate Speaker Philippe Bas a "petty tyrant." A week later, he presented extensive apologies to the Senate, stressing his "profound regret" for what he had said and insisting that he wanted to "present an apology."

The Elysée presidential palace responded aggressively to the hearings around its ex-employees, accusing the Senate of trying to usurp powers and politically attack the president. The 22 LRM senators boycotted the hearings, claiming that they were "a PR stunt more than an effective attempt to reach the truth."

Similarly, junior minister for relations with the parliament and LRM chief Christophe Castaner accused the members of the Senate inquiry into the Benalla affair of trying to undermine the head of state.

Nevertheless, he also raised an issue that high circles in the state and the ruling establishment are doubtless considering as well, saying: "If some think they can take upon themselves the power to impeach the president of the Republic, they are themselves a menace to the Republic."

Castaner raised a situation that would be without precedent in the Fifth Republic and that no one had raised until then, that is, the impeachment of Macron: "A commission of inquiry with political ambitions and that thought it could exploit its oversight functions to bring down the president of the Republic would be

committing a constitutional error."

Le Monde took Castaner's remarks seriously, however. It also advanced for a time a proposed solution: "There is only one method for impeachment. According to Article 68 of the constitution, 'the president of the Republic can be impeached only in case of having failed his duties in a way that is manifestly incompatible with his continuation in office.'" Impeachment is then 'pronounced by both houses of parliament assembled as the High Court of Justice.'"



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