

French government on verge of collapse after interior minister resigns

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Since the resignation on October 3 of Interior Minister Gérard Collomb, one of the first supporters of Emmanuel Macron and his Republic on the March (LRM) party, the French government is on the verge of collapse. On Monday, top LRM officials announced the preparation of a major cabinet reshuffle, and even potentially the resignation of Prime Minister Edouard Philippe, undermined by the government's unpopularity.

LRM officials tried to downplay the crisis, describing it simply by its impact on the state bureaucracy. The president of the National Assembly, Richard Ferrand, noted in his interview with *Le Journal du dimanche* the anger of local officials and promised to renew the “pact” Macron said he would build with regional authorities. He also indicated that the union bureaucracies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are frustrated about their relations with Macron, and have “a feeling that the nobility is speaking to them, the commoners. Nothing could be further from the truth.”

Ferrand signalled that LRM would include the unions and NGOs more in decision-making processes, promising to make “the second year of Macron’s term the year of the Contractual Republic ... Today, we have to base ourselves even more on all the forces of progress and transformation. We go faster when we go alone, but together we go further.”

Ferrand was at pains, however, to dispel any illusions that incorporating the unions into the formulation of Macron’s policies would mean any shift to the left. Asked about whether he would potentially “rebalance the government with more left-wing figures,” Ferrand dismissed this possibility, saying that he does not think “in terms of labels.”

Involving the unions more closely in Macron’s

policymaking will neither stabilize the government nor broaden its social base. The unions already were closely negotiating austerity with Macron. By plunging ahead with austerity, the Macron government will only intensify its crisis, which is rooted in the overwhelming opposition among workers in France and across Europe to the policies of militarism and austerity negotiated by the trade unions, Macron and the European Union (EU).

After the Socialist Party (PS) collapsed in last year’s presidential elections, LRM emerged from the ruins and Macron’s personal fortunes were inflated like a balloon as the ruling class sought a suitable president. It took just over a year for this balloon to explode, pricked by the pen the government used this summer to sign the accord privatising the National Railways (SNCF).

Macron’s Pyrrhic victory was possible only due to the cowardice and treachery of the union bureaucracies, who signed an agreement opposed by 95 percent of SNCF staff. But Macron’s forced privatization of the SNCF laid bare the class content of Macron’s presidency. The man who was looked on with contempt as the “president of the rich” is now hated: according to an Elabe poll, only 6 percent of the French population think that Macron’s policy will improve their economic situation.

If Nicolas Hulot abandoned the ecology ministry, and Collomb the interior, followed by a half-dozen other ministers, these are not—as Ferrand claimed about Collomb—“personal choices” reflecting “unwavering” ties to Macron. The French people are overwhelmingly hostile to the cuts in pensions, healthcare and unemployment insurance that LRM is preparing, and there is growing discontent in the state bureaucracy and the police. The decision to stay with Macron and LRM

more and more appears to be political suicide.

Like rats fleeing a sinking ship, the ministers are abandoning Macron to try to save their political careers by securing municipal office. Collomb, who left to prepare his run for city hall in Lyon, warned Macron outright that he risks falling victim to “hubris, the curse of the gods” that destroys the excessively arrogant, because “those whom the gods would destroy they first strike blind.”

The central question that emerges from this crisis is how workers mount a struggle against the program of Macron and the EU. The ability of the Macron government, isolated and discredited, to impose its will at the SNCF underscores the bankruptcy of the union bureaucracies and the allied pseudo-left parties, like the New Anticapitalist Party (NPA) and Unsubmissive France (LFI). Their perspective of “social dialog” to negotiate austerity with Macron is an illusion and a trap, because Macron has no plan except organising a social counter-revolution.

This vindicates the *Parti de l'égalité socialiste's* (PES–Socialist Equality Party) calls to form committees of action independent of the trade unions and their political allies, to prosecute the struggle. Macron is determined to finance, via austerity, tens of billions in tax cuts for the billionaires and spend €300 billion on the army as part of joint plans with Berlin for the militarization of EU foreign policy. There is nothing to negotiate with him.

To defend their social and democratic rights, workers will find themselves compelled to wage a merciless political struggle against Macron. A half-century after the May–June 1968 general strike, the alternative that is posed to the working class is not reform or revolution, but revolution or counter-revolution. The PES's role will be to intervene in these struggles to explain the necessity of transferring power to the working class and build a workers' state pursuing socialist policies.

This separates the PES from the various petty bourgeois parties that cover for the reactionary role of the trade unions, and which support Macron in the final analysis. The LFI and NPA refused to call for opposition to both neo-fascist candidate Marine Le Pen and Macron in the second round of the presidential elections last year, and Mélenchon later offered to serve Macron as prime minister. As Mélenchon insists that “to protect the state and enforce Republican norms, we

are together with the right, I'm not ashamed to say it,” he is positioning LFI to adapt to whatever alternative government the right might build.

Now, after German Interior Minister Horst Seehofer applauded neo-Nazi riots in Chemnitz, Marine Le Pen has arrived in Rome to discuss post-Brexit Europe with Matteo Salvini, the Italian neo-fascist who dominates the Italian government with only 20 percent of the vote.

Workers in France cannot submit to the workings of a ruling elite that will inevitably produce a next government even further to the right than the last. Their allies are the workers and youth mobilizing in struggle around the world against austerity, war and the militarization of Europe, and the whitewashing of the crimes of European fascism by figures like Macron's German allies.

As interest in socialism grows among American youth, and anger rises in Germany against the official legitimization of the neo-Nazis, the international preconditions are emerging for a struggle for power by the working class and the building of socialism. This will prove to be the only viable perspective upon which workers can oppose the manifest bankruptcy of the Macron government.



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