

Macron organises French cabinet reshuffle to pursue austerity and militarism

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18 October 2018

Two weeks after the departure of Interior Minister Gérard Collomb and after several failed attempts to assemble a cabinet, French president Emmanuel Macron finally presented his reworked government on Tuesday. He had pledged to reshuffle the government to give a “second wind” to his programmeme of austerity and militarism, but he presented only modest changes, designed to allow him to pursue his widely hated agenda.

Collomb was replaced by one of Macron’s close associates, the former Minister of Relations with Parliament and government spokesman, Christophe Castaner. He will be assisted by a junior minister, the former chief of domestic intelligence (DGSI), Laurent Nuñez.

Eight new ministers and secretaries of state have joined the Philippe government to replace four outgoing ministers, and a number of portfolios have changed hands or have been enlarged within the executive. But the main ministerial portfolios did not change, except for the Interior Ministry which was at the centre of the crisis that led to the reshuffle.

Jean-Yves Le Drian remains at Foreign Affairs, Bruno Le Maire at Economy and Finance, Nicole Belloubet at Justice, Florence Parly at the Ministry of the Armed Forces and Gérard Darmanin at Public Accounts. Contrary to the expectations raised by the government itself, Prime Minister Édouard Philippe has not resigned to lead a new government. The goal, according to the executive, was to “consolidate” the previous government.

The politicians who have agreed to join the government are not new supporters of Macron, but individuals allied to him prior to his election: Didier Guillaume, leader of the Socialist Party (PS) group in the Senate, who is taking over Agriculture, and Franck

Riester, expelled from the right-wing The Republicans party, is to be Minister of Culture. The other ministers come from big business, finance or are top-level state functionaries.

In a televised speech, Macron made clear the purpose of his government would be to intensify the government’s right-wing agenda. He said there would be “neither a change of orientation, nor a change of course,” and that he would “pursue deep change,” stressing continuity with the attacks he has made against the social and democratic rights of the working class.

Faced with the enormous unpopularity of his policies, the reshuffle confirmed that he could only offer more of the same, in line with his deep contempt for working people.

Playing musical chairs in the cabinet will not solve the crisis of the government, which is rooted in the enormous popular hostility to its programme, growing opposition to the government in the police forces and the increasing feeling in the political establishment that Macron’s government is close to falling. This is reflected in the many refusals by established bourgeois politicians to accept ministerial positions in Macron’s cabinet.

Castaner is neither the leading politician desired by Macron and Philippe, nor a political alternative to Collomb. This mediocre figure from La République En Marche! (LRM, Macron’s party—The Republic on the Move!) was chosen because he threatened to leave the government, and no one else acceptable to the LRM would take the job. This reshuffle will not solve persistent police protests against the government and the presidency.

Before joining Macron, Castaner made a career in the Socialist Party, in the political entourage of figures like

Michel Rocard, François Mitterrand's prime minister from 1988 to 1991, and PS politician Michel Sapin, who was economy minister under François Hollande. He was also close to Hollande's prime minister, Manuel Valls, and his repressive security agenda, and to criminologist Alain Bauer, Grand Master of the Masonic Lodge of the Grand Orient of France, who also has strong ties to police.

As the class struggle has intensified, the social base that Macron claimed to have found in the middle class, while he dealt the working class and poorer layers of the petty bourgeoisie the blows demanded by the financial aristocracy and the European Union, has disintegrated or proved to be non-existent.

The "isolation" of Macron, which the media and his political opponents treat as a personal fault of the president, is nothing more than the realisation that he no longer has any social base in the population outside the super-rich and the most affluent upper-middle class layers. Now even the police, who were a key base of Hollande's government, are rebelling against him.

Sensing that the government's days are numbered, and reflecting the feeling of part of the ruling class that the crisis of the Macron government can quickly lead to a crisis of rule, Unsubmissive France (LFI) leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon on October 14 floated the idea of dissolving the National Assembly after the May 2019 European elections. This would trigger new parliamentary elections.

"We can imagine that if we reach our goals" in the European election with "for us a national score, for him the minimum score, he will find himself facing a crisis of authority that his predecessors have never known," said Melenchon, adding "the political crisis born inside Macron's party is spreading and becoming a crisis of rule."

Mélenchon is a hardened defender of the bourgeois state and does not want to overthrow the government nor endanger it while it launches its attacks. He is advocating new elections in eight months, above all, to discourage workers from mobilizing against Macron right now. Nonetheless, it is far from certain that the Assembly will not be dissolved sooner.

One thing is clear: this government intends to survive only by a police repression of political opposition and mass intimidation. This is shown by the searches carried out at Mélenchon's home, the homes of his

former collaborators and the headquarters of the LFI and those of the Left Party. The searches took place only two days after Mélenchon publicly discussed a dissolution of the Assembly, and on the day of the cabinet reshuffle.

The operation conducted by the Paris prosecutor's office under the authority of the Ministry of Justice is a clear political signal from the government to the police and a no less clear message aimed at intimidating Mélenchon voters.



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