

French retired army generals threaten a coup d'état

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On April 21, the 60th anniversary of the 1961 attempted French military putsch in Algiers, 23 retired generals published an open letter to the government in the neofascist website Valeurs Actuelles . The letter is an extraordinary intervention by the army into political life. One hundred and fifty years after the 1871 Paris Commune and the massacre of the Communards by the army in the *Semaine sanglante*, the letter alludes to a military intervention and bloody civil war in the country, supposedly provoked by the “complacency” of the French.

The connection of these fascist threats and the growth of working class struggle is obvious. In 2019, faced with the “yellow vests” and the rail strike against pension cuts, retired General Pierre de Villiers demanded more “firmness” in police repression of protesters. As workers’ anger mounts against the European Union’s policy of “herd immunity,” which has led to over a million deaths on the continent, a clique of officers is trying to intimidate workers by raising the specter of mass murder.

Addressing Macron and the parliament, the former generals demand greater patriotism and claim, “France is in peril, several mortal dangers threaten it. ... Know that we are ready to support policies aimed at safeguarding the nation.”

The letter exudes hatred of the working class suburbs and denounces Islamism and postcolonial theories as divisive and requiring bloody repression.

Echoing Macron’s proposed fascistic law targeting so-called Islamic “separatism,” they denounce “the disintegration which, with Islamism and the suburban hordes, is leading to the separation of numerous portions of the country, transforming them into territories subject to dogmas contrary to our constitution,” They add: “Today, some speak of racialism, indigenous nationalism and decolonial theories, but through these terms it is the race war that these hateful and fanatical supporters want.”

However, the intensity and scale of the massacre that the officers describe refute the idea that their target is a team of postmodernist academic researchers, or even a small network of Islamists threatening terrorist attacks. Their target is a broader uprising. Indeed, they write in conclusion:

If nothing is done, laxity will continue to spread inexorably through society, ultimately causing an explosion and the intervention of our active comrades in a perilous mission to protect our civilisational values and safeguard our compatriots on the national territory. We see that it is no longer time to procrastinate, or else tomorrow civil war will put an end to this growing chaos, and the deaths, for which you will be responsible, will be counted in the thousands.

The rising anger among workers at the politically criminal mismanagement of the pandemic by the ruling elites terrifies the military brass. As school teacher strikes mounted last November against the reopening of schools in the midst of the pandemic, de Villiers warned in Valeurs Actuelles about the “profound changes” and political crisis he feared on an international scale in the aftermath of the pandemic.

“Today, in addition to the security crisis, there is the pandemic, all of this against a backdrop of economic, social and political crisis with a lack of confidence in leaders,” he said. “When you add up these threats, there is every reason to be worried in the short term. I fear that this pent-up anger will explode at once,” he continued, before adding: “We have to think the unthinkable. ... The rule of law is obviously respectable, but at some point, we also have to develop a strategic reflection.”

Although de Villiers did not sign the letter of April 21, it nevertheless makes clear that cliques of the military brass are working actively on precisely such a “reflection” of the alternative to a parliamentary regime—i.e, a dictatorship. This is evident from the identity of the signatories. Foreign Legion General Christian Piquemal, the first signatory of the letter and a supporter of the disbanded far-right group *Génération identitaire*, was arrested and disbarred from the army after wearing his uniform during an antimigrant demonstration in Calais in 2016.

Another, General Dominique Delarwade is campaigning against social distancing measures against the coronavirus, arguing that it “is not as lethal as people want to make it out to be.” Two other signatories, generals Emmanuel de Richoufftz and Philippe Desrousseaux de Médrano, are members of “subsisting families of the French nobility,” i.e., aristocratic families whose feudal property was expropriated in France during the 1789 revolution.

The significance of this letter cannot be understood outside the international context of the breakdown of capitalist democracy. Undermined by three decades of rising social inequality, austerity measures and imperialist wars in Europe following the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, it is buckling under the shock of the pandemic. Terrified of the anger of the masses and defending the vast fortunes it accumulated during the pandemic, the ruling class is veering towards fascist politics.

This trend is accelerating internationally. In the US, Trump attempted a coup in Washington D.C. on January 6 to occupy the Capitol and overturn the outcome of the presidential elections. Retired Spanish top brass declared their fascist sympathies in the face of strikes to halt nonessential production during the pandemic and called for the killing of “26 million” Spaniards.

In France, it is increasingly clear that the capitalist class will use the 2022 election, whatever its outcome, to install an even more authoritarian regime. On April 23, Marine Le Pen, the leader of the far-right National Rally, replied in an op-ed in *Valeurs Actuelles*, hailing the fascist generals and calling on them to support her candidacy in 2022.

Le Pen noted the “degree of concern you have in the face of the worrying deterioration of the situation in our country.” She added that their concern “requires, in a democracy, the search for a political solution, concretised by a project of change that must be confirmed by the vote

of the French. This is the object of my campaign and my candidacy for the Presidency of the Republic, with the goal of a government of National Union.”

Her decision to salute generals planning the massacre of thousands in France, with a clumsy attempt to teach them a lesson in “democracy,” confirms that a “National Union” regime led by Le Pen would be violently reactionary and bloodthirsty. The current government, which is passing fascist laws and whose coronavirus policy has caused more than 100,000 deaths during the pandemic, does not, however, represent a democratic alternative to Le Pen.

The Minister of the Armed Forces in the Macron government, Florence Parly, reacted last night on Twitter by first trying to minimise the entire affair. “The irresponsible tribune published in *Valeurs Actuelles* is only signed by retired military personnel, who no longer have any function in our armies and only represent themselves,” she wrote.

Parly also posed as a more responsible militarist than Le Pen: “Madame Le Pen’s words reflect a serious misunderstanding of the military institution, which is worrying for someone who wants to become head of the armed forces. ... The politicisation of the armed forces suggested by Madame Le Pen would weaken our military tool and therefore France.”

While pursuing “collective immunity” and anti-Muslim policies, the government is incubating fascist tendencies in the army. This vindicates the Socialist Equality Party’s warnings in the 2017 elections: Macron is not an alternative to Le Pen. The SEP called for an active boycott of the second round of elections and the building of an independent movement in the working class against the winning candidate. The pandemic has highlighted the need for such a movement on a global scale, to fight against dictatorship and the ruling class’s policy of “herd immunity.”



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