

The French army's coup plots and the global onslaught on democratic rights

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This year the day of international working class solidarity comes amid a deepening threat of far-right dictatorship. In the week before May Day, a political crisis has mounted in France over a letter by 23 retired or reservist generals in the neofascist magazine *Current Values* advocating a coup. Even as the defense ministry threatens to prosecute officers supporting the letter, growing numbers of officers are signing it—now over 7,000.

These statements must be taken as a warning to workers not only in France but internationally. Less than four months have passed since January 6, when then-US President Donald Trump sent thousands of his neofascist supporters to storm the Capitol in Washington D.C. to halt the certification of his loss in the presidential elections. This was clearly not a historical accident attributable to Trump's personal recklessness, nor did the coup's failure end the threat of fascistic rule.

As working class anger mounts at the horrific death toll of “herd immunity” policies and the enrichment of the wealthy during the pandemic, powerful factions of the ruling class in every country are contemplating military-authoritarian rule.

The letter, addressed to President Emmanuel Macron, claimed that “mortal dangers” face the French nation. It called for immediate, unspecified changes in state policy to avert “an explosion and the intervention of our active-duty comrades-in-arms in a perilous mission ... on the national soil.” Also, it asserted that “the deaths, for which you will be responsible, will be counted in the thousands.”

The retired and reservist generals couched their threats in the Islamophobic rhetoric of Macron's “anti-separatist” law targeting political Islam. Amid the debacle of France's eight-year war in Mali and

mounting anger at police violence in immigrant suburbs, they denounced “Islamism and the suburban hordes” for driving “the separation of numerous portions of the country” from state authority. They demanded that the government fight the threat of “race war” caused by “racialism, indigenous nationalism and anti-colonial theories.”

The ruling class fears not race war but class struggle. In the weeks before the letter appeared, as the COVID-19 death toll hit 1 million in Europe and 100,000 in France, Macron pledged to end social distancing, even as coronavirus variants were spreading. He bucked public expectation of a strict lockdown to halt the contagion and desperate, angry calls from medical staff for a scientific policy to halt the slaughter. He provocatively said no health statistic could change his decision to reopen schools.

On April 17, one of the leading far-right politicians behind the coup threat, far-right politician Philippe de Villiers issued a fascistic appeal in *Current Values* titled, “I call for an insurrection.” He demagogically blamed “Big Pharma, Big Data, Big Finance, the Bill Gates Foundation and the Davos Forum” for the pandemic.

Just four days later, on April 21, the generals' letter appeared. Its timing was not fortuitous. It came 60 years after the Algiers putsch of April 21, 1961—which de Villiers' father Jacques, a leader of the far-right Secret Armed Organization (OAS), supported during the Algerian war. This failed putsch, led by generals linked to wealthy French colonialists in Algeria and to General Francisco Franco's fascist regime in Spain, aimed to topple General Charles de Gaulle as he prepared to grant Algeria independence in 1962.

Philippe de Villiers' brother, General Pierre de Villiers, came out in 2019, after retiring as army chief

of staff, to demand firmer repression of “yellow vests” protesting social inequality. After over 10,000 “yellow vests” had been arrested and 4,400 wounded by police, he called for more “firmness” against strikers. “A gulf has emerged between those who lead and those who obey. This gulf is profound. ... We must restore order; things cannot continue this way.”

Amid the pandemic last year he warned of a global revolutionary crisis. “Today, beyond 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. “I fear this pent-up anger will explode at once,” he warned, adding, “We must think the unthinkable. ... The rule of law is obviously a good thing, but at some point, we also must develop a strategic plan.”

The “strategic plan” is clearly a military dictatorship. Against this, workers’ best allies are their class brothers and sisters worldwide. The pandemic is a trigger event in world history, vastly intensifying international class conflict driven by 30 years of imperialist war and social austerity following the Stalinist restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union in 1991. A global pandemic can only be halted by a globally coordinated health policy mobilizing world industry and science.

Similarly, the threat of far-right rule can only be opposed by the coordinated international action of the working class, independently of the pro-capitalist parties and union bureaucracies.

Democratic forms of rule, incompatible with the levels of social inequality and death produced by capitalism, are collapsing worldwide. Trump’s historically unprecedented coup—which nearly succeeded, as the Pentagon for hours refused to send troops to the Capitol—is only the starkest example, at the heart of world imperialism, of an international process. In Germany, multiple neo-Nazi networks in the army are compiling kill lists, after neo-Nazis murdered conservative politician Walter Lübcke in 2019 for his statements on migrants.

As neofascist presidential candidate Marine Le Pen appeals to the far-right generals for support in the 2022 elections, Macron is no alternative to far-right forces. Indeed, the generals’ letter is framed as advice to Macron, who is himself setting up a police state. Over the last week, he has maintained a deafening silence on

the generals’ letter.

Since his election in 2017, the “president of the rich” has courted the police and army. As his polls collapsed as “yellow vest” protests began in 2018, Macron took the unprecedented step of hailing France’s Nazi-collaborationist dictator Philippe Pétain as a “great soldier.” His “anti-separatist” law—overseen by Interior Minister Gérard Darmanin, an ex-member of the far-right *Action française* —aims to pose as tougher on Islam than Le Pen. This only strengthens fascistic forces in the officer corps, which Macron is cultivating as a base for “herd immunity” policies.

The Stalinist General Confederation of Labor (CGT) union and its ally, 2017 presidential candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who is asking Macron to prosecute putschist officers, are aligning themselves with the Macron regime. Having backed the European pandemic bailouts of the banks and big business, which enriched Europe’s billionaires by €1 trillion, they are complicit in “herd immunity.”

Perhaps the clearest indication of their reactionary role is the record of their Spanish ally, Podemos General Secretary and ex-Deputy Prime Minister Pablo Iglesias. He helped implement “herd immunity” policies and called on workers to ignore coup threats last year from Spanish generals close to the neo-Francoite Vox party.

The deep opposition in the working class to such homicidal policies must be mobilized. The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) has issued a call to build an International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, to open a path for workers to mobilize in a united struggle, rejecting efforts to divide them along national or ethnic lines. The fight against neofascist dictatorship and “herd immunity” policies are inseparable, moreover, from a struggle for a socialist leadership in the working class fighting the capitalist system.

The ICFI urges its readers to support and join this effort and attend the International May Day rally today.



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