

Macron presents militarist, class war program in French presidential elections

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On March 17 in Aubervilliers, Emmanuel Macron presented his program for the French presidential elections of April 10 and 24, 2022. It calls for military rearmament and deep social austerity, remaining silent on the COVID-19 pandemic despite the new wave of infections that is unfolding.

An examination of Macron's program confirms that the war NATO has waged against Russia in Ukraine since the Russian invasion represents an attempt by the imperialist ruling classes to drastically restructure the world. Presenting his program, Macron referred to the war in Ukraine: "The project that I am presenting to you today is obviously anchored in the moment that is ours, that is to say, that of the return of tragedy to history."

His program confirms the Marxist adage that to wage war against foreign rivals, the bourgeoisie also wages war on the working class at home. Amid the militarization of Europe, while Berlin triples its defense budget this year to €150 billion, Macron is calling to raise the French military budget to €50 billion and strengthen the police forces. To finance this, Macron plans to cut spending on pensions and unemployment benefits by €50 billion.

Despite Macron's ritual evocation of "sovereignty", "progress" and "humanism", it is clear that NATO's push towards a world war against Russia is inseparable from an attempt to impose deeply regressive changes on workers across Europe.

On the military front, where Macron calls for preparing France for "a high-intensity war," he is accelerating policies he had already proposed or decided:

- The increase of the military budget from €40 to 50 billion, or 2 percent of Gross Domestic Product, was foreseen by the military planning law for 2019-2025 adopted in 2018.

- The creation of a universal military service was endorsed by a law passed in 2018, as mass "yellow vests" protests against social inequality broke out.

- The creation of a military "national guard" to assist police forces inside France was raised by his government, by the neofascist candidate Marine Le Pen and by Unsubmissive France candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon.

During his first term, Macron vastly strengthened the police to violently assault strikes and authorized the army to fire on the "yellow vests." This policy of militarizing France internally is directly bound up with preparation for "high-intensity" wars, that is, wars like the current NATO-Russia war aiming to secure French imperialism's place in a capitalist redivision of the world.

Macron, widely hated by workers during his first term as "president of the rich," defines his social program as follows: "It consists of doing, in the next five years, what we did in the last five."

In fact, the program escalates attacks on workers. In line with his repeal of the Wealth Tax during his first term, Macron wants €15 billion in tax cuts, half of which will go to corporations. The reduction in unemployment insurance and, above all, the increase in the retirement age to 65 correspond to reforms imposed during his first term, but which he did not dare to implement during the pandemic due to mass social opposition.

Other reforms, however, correspond to major new attacks aimed at a reactionary transformation of society. Macron wants to force welfare recipients to work 15 to 20 hours a week to receive benefits. He is returning to his January proposal to give more "financial autonomy" to universities, an expression which he explained by brutally declaring, "We will not be able to long remain in a system where higher education has virtually no price for almost all students."

Macron wants to turn the unemployed and the poor into superexploited labor and adopt the Anglo-American model of university financing. Instead of paying a few hundred euros in tuition fees to get a mostly publicly funded education, students will have to borrow thousands

of euros each semester to pay for it, finishing their studies in debt to the tune of tens of thousands of euros or more.

Macron also calls to deport any asylum seeker whose application is rejected—thus signaling that in a second term, he would continue the attacks against working class neighborhoods and Islamic or immigrant organizations carried out during his first term.

Macron's program effectively ignores the COVID-19 pandemic and does not even mention the name of the disease. It has infected more than 24 million people and caused 140,000 deaths in France and 1.7 million in Europe and regularly infects around 100,000 people per day in France as a new wave of the BA.2 variant devastates Europe. Macron's silence in his program indicates that he plans to continue his government's current refusal to take any measures to stop the spread of the virus.

Nonetheless, it is clear that the pandemic has lastingly undermined French capitalism. The European stimulus packages adopted during the pandemic enriched France's propertied classes to the tune of hundreds of billions of euros. European states financed these transfers of money to the super-rich by massively expanding their debts, with France's debt rising from 90 percent to 115 percent of gross domestic product (GDP). French capitalism is effectively bankrupt, even if this is not typically acknowledged, undermined internally by the obscene fortunes of its ruling elites.

The presidential elections mark in France the historical crisis of capitalism that is being played out on a global scale with the NATO-Russia conflict. While European governments turned to austerity after the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, they joined NATO wars in Iraq, Yugoslavia, Somalia, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, Mali and beyond. Now a new stage of this crisis is emerging. NATO's threats against Russia, a nuclear-armed power, go hand in hand with turns towards military-fascistic forms of rule and the impoverishment of the working class.

Macron's attempt to blame his militaristic policy on the invasion of Ukraine by Russian forces is a cynical dodge. The invasion of Ukraine is a reactionary action that divides Russian and Ukrainian workers. But NATO played the central role in provoking this invasion, arming Ukraine and refusing to offer security guarantees demanded by Russia.

Macron in fact denounced this policy shortly before the COVID-19 pandemic began, insisting on the need to do precisely the opposite of NATO's current policy.

Speaking to the British magazine the *Economist*, he criticized the dependence of European finance on US management of the dollar and denounced NATO's aggressive policy towards Russia.

“What we are experiencing is for me that NATO is brain-dead,” Macron said, adding: “That the United States is very hard towards Russia is a form of administrative, political, and historical hysteria. ... If we want to build peace in Europe, rebuild European strategic autonomy, we need to reconsider our position with Russia.”

Now, “brain-dead” Macron is aligning himself with Washington's “political hysteria” against Russia, risking nuclear war, in order to intensify the militaristic and anti-worker policies he pursued throughout his term.

The fact that Macron is nonetheless currently in first place in the election polls, with 31 per cent of the vote in the first round, does not reflect popular support for his policies, but the bankruptcy of the rival candidates and the sclerosis of the French ruling elite. After decades of austerity and war by the PS and its pseudo-left satellites, no candidate presented by the media as “left” enjoys broad support among workers. Workers' opposition to Macron's policies of NATO war and mass COVID-19 infection finds no expression within a corrupt political establishment.

The presidential elections will not solve any essential problem for workers. Whether Macron wins, or another candidate, an explosive confrontation is being prepared between the ruling elite and the working class. Workers will only be able to defend their interests through an international mobilization against war, pandemic and the diktat of the banks, in an open revolt against the trade union apparatuses and in struggle for socialism.



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