

Elisabeth Borne named French Prime Minister: Macron launches assault on the workers

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On May 16, President Emmanuel Macron named Elisabeth Borne prime minister. Friday evening, Borne announced the composition of her government, in continuity with Macron's first term. While the bourgeois media is predictably hailing the nomination of a woman to the post, it is a sign that Macron is planning an all-out attack against the working class in his second term.

In her previous role as director of strategy under Macron for the French National Railways (SNCF) and earning more than 25,000 euros a month, she tore up the regulatory statutes of rail workers. She thus sabotaged rail workers' wages, who were paid ten times less than her remuneration. And above all, it was as Minister of Labour during the COVID-19 pandemic that she elaborated the health protocols in July 2020 put in place after France's first lockdown.

These politically criminal protocols have been a disaster. Whilst the pandemic was largely under control at the end of the lockdown, with only a few hundred daily cases, the protocols allowed a massive resurgence of the virus. The cost in lives of this policy, replicated throughout the EU, has been monumental. More than 117,000 of the 148,000 deaths from Covid-19 in France and 1.6 million out of 1.8 million in Europe date from after the adoption of the protocols drafted by Borne.

The nomination of Borne constitutes a pledge by Macron to the financial aristocracy to continue with his socially regressive policies, even as she lines up behind the war policy of NATO in the Ukraine against Russia, threatening an escalation into a Third World War. Unsurprisingly, the ruling class is concentrating public attention on Borne's identity as a woman, as political cover under which to pursue this reactionary policy.

During the handover ceremony of power from her predecessor Jean Castex, Borne tried to attract support from the middle-class feminist milieu. "I dedicate this nomination to all the little girls", she declared. "Nothing must stop the fight for women's place in society." Borne added that she was "very moved" and that she "saved a thought for Edith Cresson," the only other woman to have occupied the post of prime minister in France.

Since then, Borne has issued a policy based on ecology and modernization. She has renewed most of the senior right-wing ministers, with Bruno Le Maire at the Finance Ministry (2nd highest ranking in the order of precedence among ministers) and Gérard Darmanin third at the Interior Ministry. Former Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian is being replaced by Catherine Colonna, a right-wing diplomat who reportedly played a role in formulating policy during the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and on Brexit.

For the Ministry of Education, Borne tapped Pap Ndiaye, a Franco-Senegalese historian of the United States' black population who teaches at the School of Advanced Studies in Social Sciences (EHESS) and supports the Black Lives Matter movement financed by corporate America.

In the second round of the presidential elections, the Parti de l'égalité socialiste (PES) called for a working class campaign to boycott both candidates, Emmanuel Macron and Marine Le Pen, rejecting both candidates. The PES declared that a government formed by Macron would not be a democratic alternative to Le Pen. The decisive question was to arm workers with an irreconcilable opposition to both candidates in order to prepare them for the struggles they will have to lead

against the next government.

The reactionary social and health policies announced by Borne, within the framework of the military foreign policy promoted by Macron and NATO, vindicate the position of the PES. Moreover, it is clear that the nomination of Borne and Ndiaye, hailed by the media as a sign of openness, will not stop or even significantly slow the accelerating slide of Macron to extreme right positions.

As Macron installed Borne as prime minister, Darmanin continued his repressive anti-Muslim campaign. As a sympathizer of the far right *Action française* who sponsored the “anti-separatism law” targeting Muslim associations, he wants to legally invalidate a local bylaw of the city of Grenoble allowing women to wear burkini swim-suits.

The half-hearted attempts by the media to present Borne as a sympathetic personality based on feminism only reveal how racial and gender politics serve as a cover for anti-democratic and authoritarian policies.

The media is promoting the difficult childhood of Borne, the daughter of a couple of pharmacists in Paris who received state support after the suicide of her father when she was 11 years old. This tragic experience in Borne’s life arouses much more sympathy, however, than the conclusions she seems to have drawn from that event.

In effect, she used the Ecole Polytechnique and the Socialist Party (PS) as mechanisms for social climbing at the expense of the workers. Having joined the PS in 1987, she made a career on the boards of major corporations, notably the SNCF railways and Eiffage. During a TV program in 2021, she explained that she was concerned about her “financial independence” after the death of her father: “I hung on and was able to get admission to an engineering school where I was paid by the State, and that was a real relief.”

Thus the feminist media promotion of Borne is centered on an attempt to calm workers’ anger and strangle the class struggle by selling the illusions of wealthy technocrats like Borne struggling to get their place in the sun.

Edith Cresson, the PS prime minister under the presidency of François Mitterrand in 1991-1992 during the dissolution of the Soviet Union by the Stalinist bureaucracy, declared on BFM-TV that it was “high time” to name another woman prime minister. She

thanked Borne for referring to her, saying, “In a very short speech, she found the means to express something that really moved me.”

In fact, the role of Cresson only underlines the reactionary character of the PS and the attempts of pseudo-left forces like Jean-Luc Mélenchon and his “New Popular Union” with the PS to sell the latter as a progressive party on feminist grounds.

Cresson was an activist in the Convention of Republican Institutions (CIR), a party led in the 1960s by the ex-Vichy collaborators François Mitterrand and Charles Hernu, which played a central role in founding the PS in 1971. She was in office during the first Gulf War against Iraq and the launching of the European Union with the Maastricht Treaty. Cresson was hated by workers due to her policy of wage freezes. She also was criticized for denouncing homosexuality as “different and marginal” and dismissing the Japanese people as “ants.”

Today, Cresson saluted Margaret Thatcher and Angela Merkel, right-wing female politicians who imposed draconian austerity on the workers. The nomination of Borne, Cresson said, is “an event because France is what France is, the political establishment is what it is, but in another country this is not an event. Neither about Mrs. Thatcher nor Mrs. Merkel nor in Portugal, where a woman was named prime minister long before me, did anyone cry out that it was something extraordinary.”

In truth, the nomination of Borne as prime minister is not extraordinary and changes nothing fundamentally. While NATO intensifies its war against Russia in Ukraine, Macron is launching an offensive at home against the working class, to slash pensions, and unemployment benefits and to undermine publicly funded universities, while leaving workers continually exposed to COVID-19. This is preparing ever more explosive confrontations between Macron and the working class.



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