

Amid strike wave across France, Macron calls to rearm against Russia

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On Monday, President Emmanuel Macron pledged to put France on a war footing, boost military spending and impose speedup on workers.

Speaking at the Eurosatory military show in Paris, Macron said France and the European Union (EU) are in a “war economy [for which] we must lastingly organize ourselves.” Citing NATO’s war with Russia in Ukraine, he said, “I have asked the [defense] ministry and the general staff to carry out in coming weeks a reevaluation of the military budget law given the current geopolitical context.”

With France’s military budget of €40.4 billion set to increase to €50 billion by 2025, Macron said: “We still have much to do to react to the deep transformations we are going through. And anyone who doubts the urgency of these efforts should look yet again to Ukraine, whose soldiers are demanding quality weapons and who have a right to an answer on our part. ... We will take the decisions on investment and will advance the demands that go with them.”

As strikes spread across France, Macron is doubling down in support of the NATO war with Russia shortly after winning reelection against neofascist candidate Marine Le Pen in April. Hospital and airport workers went on strike last week, and mass transit workers and truckers are set to strike next week amid mounting anger at inflation and rising prices. Macron’s party was beaten into second place in this weekend’s first round of the legislative elections by Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s New Popular Ecological and Social Union (NUPES).

France’s “president of the rich” is providing a classic example of how a desperate, hated government uses military adventures abroad to try to strangle the class struggle at home. Macron is trying to use the war NATO has launched with Russia in Ukraine to justify a reactionary agenda of military spending increases, €80

billion in social cuts, and imposing speedup on workers in strategic industries—in the face of mounting social opposition.

As Macron spoke, military planning officials revealed to *Le Monde* drafts of a draconian new law allowing the state to requisition industrial production and dictate workflow speed in any industry related to defense. The General Directorate for Armament (DGA) is coordinating this plan together with France’s major defense contracting companies such as Thales or Dassault and their parts suppliers.

Le Monde described it as “a bill allowing for the requisitioning of material or abilities of civilian companies even if France is not formally at war, as the law currently specifies. ... The state could, for example, ask a mid-sized business specializing in precision mechanics that does not work in the defense sector to make itself available to a defense contractor and to speed up work on its assembly line.”

DGA chief Alexandre Lahousse told *Le Monde* it aims to boost France’s capacity to produce “shells, missiles, artillery and armament for infantrymen,” the main equipment needed in the Ukraine war. It also entails requisitioning large quantities of critical raw materials, including titanium, steel, and rare earth elements, or critical parts such as semiconductors. “Many corporations fear that Washington will requisition these materials for its own armies,” the paper noted.

Not only the rapidly increasing danger of world war breaking out in Europe, but also bitter strategic and corporate rivalries between the major NATO imperialist powers—notably between Washington and the EU powers—are driving Macron’s reckless military planning.

Germany in particular has announced a massive €100

billion special fund for military rearmament, as it repudiates the policy of military restraint it adopted after the fall of the Nazi regime and seeks to again emerge as Europe's hegemonic military power. After the two world wars fought between France and Germany in the 20th century, the explosive rearmament of Germany is no doubt causing consternation in significant sections of the French military brass.

During the presidential elections, neofascist candidate Marine Le Pen denounced Germany as "the absolute negative of the strategic identity of France." She also called for "a strategic rapprochement between NATO and Russia" once the Ukraine war was ended and criticized US foreign policy towards China as "too aggressive." While apparently less aggressive against Russia and China, however, Le Pen called to threaten Algeria and develop France's imperialist wars in its former colonial empire in Africa.

Macron speaks, however, for forces in the French bourgeoisie that, despite growing conflicts with Berlin, are trying to work with it to build up the EU as a counterweight to Washington. He did not denounce Berlin, but implicitly criticized it for devoting its €100 billion special fund to purchasing US weapons, like F-35 fighters and Chinook helicopters, rather than to multibillion-euro plans for a new, jointly developed Franco-German tank and jet fighter.

"Let us not go forward by repeating the errors of the past: spending a lot to buy things from elsewhere is not a good idea," Macron said. "Now is the time to impose a preference for European products. ... We need to reinforce industry and an industrial and technological base for European defense that is much stronger and more demanding, otherwise we will simply build the new dependencies of tomorrow."

Macron's warmongering remarks point to the mortal crisis of the capitalist system. In the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, EU and US authorities plunged trillions of euros and dollars into bank bailouts for the super-rich, while insisting that there was no money for a scientifically guided fight to stop the pandemic. These bank bailouts have fueled inflation that is now devastating workers' living standards and provoking a growing strike wave.

Like other NATO heads of state, Macron is responding by stoking the war with Russia and moving to reimpose some form of state of emergency or martial

law, on the fraudulent pretext that he is preparing for a war of national defense. But the threat to workers' lives and living standards in France and across Europe comes not from Russia, but from the reckless social and military policies of NATO imperialist governments.

During the second round of the presidential elections between Macron and Le Pen in April, the *Parti de l'égalité socialiste* (PES) called for a campaign in the working class to boycott the second round, reject both candidates, and prepare for a movement against whichever candidate won. It emphasized that Macron would not be an alternative to Le Pen, but would also march towards dictatorship and war. Macron's calls to place France on a war footing vindicate this assessment.

It also exposes the strategy advanced by Mélenchon and the NUPES against Macron, which is to call on voters to give the NUPES a majority in the National Assembly that would make Mélenchon prime minister. Such an arrangement would leave Macron as president with full control over foreign policy. It would thus allow Macron to impose military rearmament and press for cuts to wages and social spending, tearing apart Mélenchon's promises to increase wages and pensions.

Mélenchon's decision to align himself with the flood of denunciations of Russia by Macron and the capitalist media must be taken as a warning: He and the French union bureaucracies would capitulate to Macron's calls to slash living standards to boost the war effort.

The defense of wages and social rights against Macron, like the struggle to prevent all-out NATO war with Russia, now depend on the independent, international movement of the working class to halt the spiral of inflation and oppose the drive to war.



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