

In TV interview, French Prime Minister Borne pledges to impose pension cuts

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On Thursday night, French Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne appeared as a guest on France2 television's "l'Évènement" programme to insist that she would impose the government's widely hated pension reform in the face of massive popular opposition. An opinion poll published by BFM-TV on Wednesday found 71 percent of the French population oppose the reform.

Borne's determination to run roughshod over the opposition of the workers exposes the anti-democratic character of President Macron's regime, which is escalating NATO's war against Russia. Workers can expect nothing from new discussions between Borne and the French trade union bureaucracies, which have already negotiated the current cuts with the employers and with Macron themselves.

Instead, the working class must rebel against the bureaucracies, which serve to channel and demobilise their struggles, and instead, build an independent global movement against austerity and war.

In the interview, Borne declared: "It is essential to carry out a reform to preserve our pension system by redistribution," even if "asking the French to work progressively longer is not easy." Asked whether she would describe her reform as "fair," she did not dare use the word, instead preferring to say: "We need justice in the way we distribute the effort among the French."

These are all political lies. In the interview, Caroline Roux, the journalist from state-run France2 television, carefully avoided asking the essential questions raised by the pension cut. It would cut tens of billions of euros per year in social spending, while allowing the government to raise military spending by tens of billions of euros per year. According to Macron, this

will let France participate in "high-intensity" wars in the context of the escalating conflict between NATO and Russia in Ukraine.

Garcia also failed to raise the recent Oxfam wealth report, which highlighted the glaring social inequality in the world and in France. This report demonstrated that taxing only 2 percent of the wealth of the richest section of French society could sustain the current pension system. In the France2 interview, however, the issue of taxing the wealthy was completely ignored.

Nevertheless, France2's video portraits of several French workers, broadcast in the same programme, refuted Borne's arguments and revealed her contempt for the working class.

As she presented a graph showing that men would end up retiring later than women, Borne said: "I can assure you that this reform protects women who started working early, women who are in difficult jobs, women who had to interrupt their careers."

This was contradicted by the portrait of a driving instructor who said she was "disgusted" that the reform would force her to retire later than expected, because of breaks in her career for maternal leave.

The interview also touched on the issue of long careers and arduous work. In another portrait, Thierry, a worker in a machining factory since he was 17, asked Borne: "I hope they will think about those who work hard like us. Do you think about that?"

Borne replied, "Of course we think about it. And first of all, I would like to reassure Thierry, who started

working at 17. Obviously, he won't have to work until he's 64. I think he will leave at 60."

In fact, Borne was wrong, and the government's own diagram—which was projected on the screen behind Borne as she spoke—indicates that Thierry would retire at 61. Indeed, under the new reform, long career workers like Thierry will have to contribute to their pension for 44 years, not 43 years like workers who start their careers at or after age 21.

The whole interview reeked of bankers' and top state officials' contempt for the world of work. Asked about the hardship of workers who carry heavy loads, Elisabeth Borne said, "we will cover other causes of hardship than those [currently] considered ... We are creating a new system in which we will identify the jobs that generate professional wear and tear." According to Borne, workers in one of these identified sectors will undergo a medical check-up that could eventually allow them to retire at 62.

This sleight of hand does not commit the government to anything. Which jobs will be included in this new scheme remains to be defined. Moreover, it is the French occupational health service, known for its arbitrariness and its bias in favor of employers, which will determine on a case-by-case basis whether a worker can leave earlier than the planned date. Remarkably, as Roux pointed out, the job of a mover is no longer among the jobs considered hard since Macron's arrival at the Elysée presidential palace.

Macron's pension reform manifestly aims to free up tens of billions for shareholders and for war, at the cost of breaking the bodies of workers who are nearing retirement.

This interview confirms that there is nothing to negotiate with Macron, and that it is necessary to build an international socialist movement, independent of the union bureaucracies, to allow the workers to bring down his government and take power.



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