

Macron brazenly defends decision to impose pension cuts without parliamentary vote

Alex Lantier

22 March 2023

Yesterday, in a mid-afternoon TV address, President Emmanuel Macron defended his move to impose pension cuts opposed by 80 percent of the French people without a vote in parliament. He also pledged to pass a new immigration law that aims to speed up deportations and limit the right to asylum.

Macron's address totally exposed those, like the leaders of France's union confederations or the Unsubmissive France (LFI) party, who argued for impotently imploring Macron not to promulgate the law he had just imposed. Even as millions of workers strike and protest today, it is evident that Macron intends to run roughshod over basic social and democratic rights.

His address, timed to fall at a time when few workers could watch it, confirmed that there is no "democratic" way forward in the struggle against Macron. He is trampling public opinion underfoot to impose the diktat of the banks, diverting tens of billions of euros from pensions to bank bailouts and the military build-up for war with Russia. His actions have torn the "democratic" veil off the state, which is a naked dictatorship of the capitalist oligarchy that impoverishes the masses via presidential fiat and police violence.

Before his TV address, speaking to members of his own Renaissance party, Macron provocatively asserted that the people do not have the legitimacy to challenge his government. He said, "If you believe in the democratic and republican order, riots do not trump the representatives of the people, and crowds have no legitimacy against the people whose sovereignty is expressed through its elected officials."

This is a conception of elections with which any dictator could agree. According to Macron's argument, being elected president means that until the next elections, one is free to trample the will of the people underfoot. Mass protests with overwhelming popular support must bow, in this view, to diktat of the president and his hordes of

thousands of heavily-armed riot police.

During his TV interview, Macron maintained this anti-democratic pretense, ludicrously claiming that by slashing pensions and living standards, he is defending democracy against the people. "The reform will pursue its democratic path," Macron claimed about his pension cuts, adding: "This reform is necessary, there are not 36 solutions. ... I am ready to be unpopular."

Asked if there is anything he regretted or would have done differently, Macron said he regretted "not having succeeded in convincing people of the need for the reform."

In fact, the justifications Macron advanced for his cuts failed to convince the population because they were all lies. These included above all the claims that the pension system is bankrupt, and that there is no more money to be found. In reality, the pension system has a balanced budget; if there is no more money for it, it is that Macron is raising military spending by nearly 100 billion euros over the rest of the decade, while leaving his billionaire backers like Bernard Arnault at a zero percent effective tax rate.

Having admitting that the population is convinced his cuts are destructive and bitterly opposed to Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne's government, Macron pledged to keep Borne in office. He pledged to carry out a "forced march" on policies like the draconian immigration bill.

Finally, Macron defended himself against press criticisms of his provocative comment that he has more democratic legitimacy than the views of over three-quarters of the French people. He compared workers striking against his cuts to neo-Nazi forces who supported then-US President Donald Trump's attempted putsch on January 6, 2021 targeting the Capitol building in Washington, or to military officers plotting a coup in last year's Brazilian elections.

Denouncing workers exercising their constitutionally-

protected right to strike and protest as “agents of sedition,” Macron said: “Given that the United States went through what they did at the Capitol, and that Brazil went through what it did, we must say, ‘We respect, we listen,’ but we cannot accept either agents of sedition or rebellious factions.”

This turns reality on its head. Trump’s coup attempt in America took place when the sitting president tried to block the congressional certification of his defeat in the 2020 elections, trampling the election result underfoot. Brazil’s military officials also attempted a Trump-style putsch, working closely with the sitting president, Jair Bolsonaro, after the election result went against him.

It is Macron, using the prerogatives of his office and his control over France’s massive police-state machine, who is also trying to trample the will of the people, not tens of millions of workers in France who are opposed to the slashing of their pensions and living standards.

Class tensions are continuing to mount rapidly in the run-up to today’s one-day protest against the pension cuts. Macron is continuing to deploy heavily-armed riot police to attack protesters and now also to assault the picket lines of refinery and garbage collection workers striking against his cuts.

The way forward for the working class in this confrontation with the capitalist state and Macron is to take strike struggles out of the hands of forces like the union bureaucracies and the pseudo-left, who tie workers to the capitalist state machine on the fraudulent grounds that it is democratic. The feckless and cowardly response of the French political establishment to Macron’s address shows they are bankrupt and organically tied to the capitalist state machine.

LFI leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon said that Macron had acted with “the usual signs of contempt” for the public. Accusing Macron of “living outside of all reality,” Mélenchon asked, “How is it possible, as the country is plunging into a dead end, ...[to] lie with such arrogance?”

One reason why Macron can lie with such arrogance is that he is sure that Mélenchon and his allies will make no serious attempt to mobilize opposition against him. During the 2022 presidential elections, Mélenchon received nearly 8 million votes, including majorities in the working class districts of almost all of France’s largest cities. Now, as two-thirds of the French people support a general strike to stop Macron, a campaign by LFI for a general strike could rapidly bring down the Macron government.

But Mélenchon has abstained from making any such

appeals and is instead trying to drive the workers behind the union bureaucracy and its impotent perspective of seeking negotiated settlements with the capitalist state machine.

Yesterday, the leader of the Stalinist General Confederation of Labor (CGT) bureaucracy, Philippe Martinez, lamely insisted that his union should not bear the blame for actions the workers may take against the Macron government in anger at his remarks. Martinez said, “These remarks will stoke the anger. He did not take into account either our warnings, or the anger. ... The trade union organizations asked him to invite us for talks. We pointed to the explosive situation.”

Macron refused to invite union leaders, Martinez complained, and has “taken no heed of the determination” of workers.

Martinez and other high-ranking CGT bureaucrats failed to make any appeal to mobilize workers more broadly in defense of refinery and garbage workers assaulted by Macron’s police.

The way forward for workers is to take control of the struggle into their own hands, organizing in rank-and-file committees independent of the union bureaucracies. This is critical to promptly launch strike actions, coordinate solidarity actions and defend workers assaulted by the police-state machine, and mobilize the vast anger building in the working class against Macron, war and the capitalist system.

Successfully waging such a struggle depends on linking the mass strikes in France to the explosion of the class struggle unfolding across Europe and internationally in a revolutionary struggle for socialism. Macron has again made clear that there is nothing to negotiate with him or with the banks. The critical question is to transfer state power from the bankrupt capitalist state to the workers’ organizations of struggle, in a socialist revolution in France and internationally.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)