

Riots erupt across France as Constitutional Council validates Macron's pension cuts

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At 6 p.m. yesterday, France's Constitutional Council ruled that President Emmanuel Macron's pension cuts are constitutional, removing the last legal obstacle to their adoption as law. The Elysée presidential palace announced 15 minutes later that Macron will promulgate the pension cuts as law within 48 hours.

The Council's predictable approval of a law opposed by 80 percent of the French people, which Macron rammed through without even a vote in parliament, again tears the "democratic" mask off the capitalist state. It imposes the diktat of the banks, which plan amid the NATO-Russia war in Ukraine to massively divert social spending into strengthening the military-police machine. The struggle against the pension cuts can only be waged as a political struggle directed against the entire capitalist state machine.

The Council's decision also exposes the forces in the union bureaucracy and the pseudo-left parties who, warning of "violence" by protesters, told workers to place their hopes in trade union "mediation" with Macron. Everyone involved, including masses of workers and youth, knew very well that Macron would ignore the "mediation." On the other hand, two-thirds of the French people supported a general strike to block the economy and bring down Macron.

The bureaucrats simply worked to wear down and demobilize mass anger with reactionary and pointless promises to resume talks with Macron.

Protests and riots erupted in over 100 cities across France yesterday evening after the announcement of the ruling. Rennes saw heavy clashes with police as protesters stormed and burned down a police station and set the door of the Jacobins Convent church on fire. There were also clashes in Grenoble and Lyon, where heavily-armed riot police put the Croix-Rousse neighborhood on lock-down.

In Paris, where a massive police deployment and a police ban on demonstrations protected the offices of the Constitutional Council, several thousand protesters gathered on the Place de Grève in front of City Hall. They marched initially west towards the Elysée palace but were turned back by a series of police charges, finally marching towards Republic Square. Clashes between police and youth protesters who set garbage bins on fire continued throughout the night.

The Constitutional Council is a body of unelected reactionaries hand-picked by successive French presidents to nine-year terms. One of its top members is Alain Juppé, the convicted embezzler and former French prime minister, who in 1995 provoked mass rail strikes with the first plan for pension cuts in France, four years after the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union. Its president is the social-democrat Laurent Fabius, for whom laws were changed to avoid his conviction after his government let all France's hemophiliacs be infected with AIDS-tainted blood in the 1980s.

Unsurprisingly, the Council issued an illegitimate, anti-democratic ruling that discredits the capitalist state as a whole. It made only minor changes to the cuts, stripping out certain "social" measures—like a requirement to report corporations who fire older workers to hire younger, cheaper workers—that Macron added in as a meaningless sop to the union bureaucrats.

Workers and youth must continue to oppose this anti-democratic pension cut and the brutal police-state regime led by Macron, which is trying to impose it on them. To wage this struggle, however, they first face the task of building a movement of the rank-and-file, independent of the union bureaucracies which are working to protect Macron. The initial responses of the union bosses and pseudo-left politicians to the

Constitutional Council's ruling made clear they intend to continue wearing down the movement with calls for periodic protests without any perspective.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon, whose Unsubmissive France (LFI) party leads the New Popular Union (NUPES) with the rumps of the French social-democratic and Stalinist parties, reacted immediately after the verdict. He tweeted, "The decision of the Constitutional Council shows it is more attentive to the needs of the presidential monarchy than to those of the sovereign people. The struggle continues and must gather its strength."

Later on in the evening, Mélenchon again tweeted to emphasize that he and his allies intend to work closely with the union bureaucracies to keep political control of workers' struggles. He wrote, "The exceptional violence of the decisions of the Constitutional Council require intense coordination between the NUPES and the trade unions to continue the struggle and to control the fightback. We are alerting about anger and despair."

Mélenchon's call to "control the fightback" aims not to mobilize and give a perspective for social anger, but to divert it into the dead end of union "mediation" with Macron. Indeed, Mélenchon had nearly 8 million votes in last year's presidential election, largely in working class neighborhoods of France's major cities. An appeal to his voters to take mass strike action to bring down Macron could rapidly block France's economy, as a large majority of the French people support doing.

Mélenchon has abstained from any such call, however, instead issuing an absurd proposal for a general strike addressed to the trade union leaders, who had no intention of acting on it. Still fearing that they cannot call off the movement without provoking a wave of strikes outside their control, the union bosses are continuing to call strikes while trying to wear down the movement.

Stéphanie Binet, the financial journalist and managers' union head newly chosen to run the General Confederation of Labor's (CGT) Stalinist bureaucracy, issued an impotent appeal from the all-trade union alliance to Macron to show "wisdom" and abandon the pension cuts he just imposed.

She turned down Macron's invitation to the all-trade union alliance for talks Tuesday and called for a "historic, popular tsunami" of participation in May Day protests. Binet said, "We will not go see the president if

he promulgates the cuts as law. But if he withdraws them, it will be with great pleasure that we will go have discussions with him."

Given mass anger in the working class, certain political allies of the union bureaucracies tried to restrain expressions of "great pleasure" at the idea of meeting France's president of the rich and present a more "militant" face. Thus Olivier Besancenot, the former presidential candidate of the Pabliste New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA), tweeted: "Here lies the tomb of the Fifth Republic, 1958-2023 RIP. The struggle continues!"

Proclamations that the Fifth Republic is dead by middle class allies of the union bureaucracies working to demobilize opposition to Macron and the Fifth Republic's police-state regime are politically worthless. The class struggle has confirmed that these pseudo-left groups work to tie workers to a bankrupt perspective of bureaucratic "social dialog" with a capitalist state that now unabashedly rules against the people.

As social anger continues to mount, the decisive task remains to prepare a general strike to bring down Macron, the investment banker, architect of the pension cuts, and center of the police state conspiracies against workers. But the ruling of the Constitutional Council brings to an end one period of the struggle against Macron. It has confirmed that there is no "democratic" path within the existing state structure and its official channels for "social dialogue" to oppose the diktat of the banks.

The task now is to build from below a mass movement of the working class, organized in action committees of the rank-and-file, to bring down Macron, alongside a political movement to transfer state power to the organizations of the working class.



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