

Macron reshuffles government to prepare new round of attacks on working class

Anthony Torres
26 July 2023

After having imposed his unpopular pension cut in the Spring, French president Emmanuel Macron has reshuffled his government to prepare for further attacks against social benefits when the government returns to its regular schedule in September.

Macron knows he governs against the popular will and is only able to impose his rule through police repression of opposition and the support of the trade union bureaucracies. The war NATO is pursuing against Russia in Ukraine has exacerbated the inflation which is ravaging the population. A massive rearmament of the French military is being funded by vicious cuts to social welfare.

The “president of the rich” imposed his pension reform using the anti-democratic mechanism of the 49-3 article of the constitution without even a vote in parliament, deploying a massive police presence to break the strikes and protest movement.

In recent weeks, Macron has had to face a second revolt against his government—riots against police violence after the police murder of teenager Nahel M. President Macron’s regime responded by mobilizing 45,000 heavily armed police to stamp out demonstrations. Soon after the start of the riots, the police union declared it was at “war” with the “savage hordes”. With noisy support from the far-right National Rally party of Marine Le Pen, the police, aided by extreme right elements, brutally cracked down on workers and youth.

Just before the reshuffle, Macron congratulated himself for his pension cut. He told BFMTV, “We have got things moving, from pensions to the labor market. We have taken strong action on jobs, energy, and environmental transition. We have championed great reforms.”

The president’s bravado hides a government in crisis.

The media indicate that Macron and Elisabeth Borne, who has been kept in her post as prime minister, had a very difficult time reshuffling the government. The *Huffington Post* reported that it took three meetings between Macron and Borne to decide on new ministers.

The reshuffle should have concluded on Thursday last week but was delayed until the next day. Thursday evening, a prominent government advisor expressed clear annoyance on BFMTV at the lack of any communication from the government or Elysée Palace saying, “When you start off on the wrong foot, that’s what happens. Everything is rubbish about this sequence of events.”

Thomas Cazeneuve is to replace Gabriel Attal at the Ministry of Public Finances, while the latter becomes Minister of State Education and Youth replacing Pap Ndiaye. Aurore Berger takes on the Ministry of Solidarity, and Aurélien Rousseau becomes Minister of Health and Prevention.

The major ministers publicly associated with the pension cut and the police repression have kept their positions. Bruno Le Maire remains Economics Minister and Eric Dupond-Moretti remains Minister of Justice. Gérald Darmanin, former member of the extreme right-wing group Action Française who supervised the repression of the demonstrations against the pension reform and police violence, remains Minister of the Interior and Overseas Territories.

Macron is placing his government on a war-footing against the working class, telling his new cabinet he wanted other “decisive reforms” to be carried out in the autumn: “Things will not be easier next Autumn, because French political life will not be easier.”

The government wants to deepen austerity to make the working class pay for imperialist war. Macron

wrongly claimed that there was no money for pensions. However, with his call to build a European “war economy” it is more and more obvious that the pension cut was made to finance a massive diversion of resources to the military machine to fund the world war being prepared behind the backs of the population.

The future Military Appropriations Bill raises total spending on the armed forces to €413 billion over the next seven years. The annual military budget will reach €69 billion by 2030, compared to €32 billion in 2017. In his Finance Bill for 2024, Macron wants a reduction of €4.2 billion in state spending, the first headline reduction in ten years.

Faced with the overwhelming opposition of the French people to Macron’s pension reforms, the trade union bureaucracies and their pseudo-left allies like Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s La France Insoumise (Unsubmissive France), the New Anti-capitalist Party of Olivier Besancenot, or Lutte ouvrière (LO) of Nathalie Arthaud, have been able to stifle social opposition to Macron. While two-thirds of the population were in favor of blocking the economy and deepening the struggle against the president, the trade union apparatus conspired to shut down the struggle.

To impose the next attacks against the working class, Macron intends to again call on the service of the trade unions. The president consulted with their leaders ahead of his reshuffle. François Hommeril, President of the CFE-CGC union for technicians and middle-management, said Elisabeth Borne had shown a desire to restart “the part of negotiations we wish to start with business leaders and for which we want the government to engage in a procedure”. He continued that the prime minister had “met our expectations on this subject”.

For the general secretary of the CGT union Sophie Binet, “if Emmanuel Macron has taken the lead in the first stage of the Tour [de France], to use the sporting metaphor, he is burnt out, he has no more team left, he’s alone. Cycling is a team sport.” The CGT leader boasted of the successes of her union which “is growing with 40,000 new members. The end of this stage is going to last another four years and that is going to be extremely difficult for the government. And we are continuing with the question of pensions, wages and notably on the environment”.

Binet boasts of having won 40,000 new members

during the pension struggle, but the CGT went to the negotiating table with the Joint Trade Union Committee to bolster the government weakened by mass and prolonged demonstrations. The remarks by Binet are above all an admission of worker opposition to Macron which will continue and grow deeper, raising fears in the CGT of being outflanked by a militant working class.

While Macron wants to intensify his attacks against the working class and increase the military budget for war, all the cynical measures put forward by these organizations have failed. Events have fully confirmed the analysis of the Parti de l’égalité socialiste (PES) and its call to bring down the Macron regime.

Since the start of the struggle against the pension reform, the PES has insisted that the workers’ struggle confronted it with the entire capitalist state, with workers obliged to organize themselves independently of the trade union apparatus to bring down Macron.

At the time the PES stated, “A powerful mass movement is developing, but from the outset it finds itself at an impasse. Every one of the half-measures from within the political system that Macron’s rivals proposed to stop him have failed. The parliament failed to censure Macron for forcing it to adopt the cuts without a vote. Macron’s collapse in the polls and growing expressions of fear within ruling circles over the mass protests did not persuade Macron to retreat. Nor did the union bureaucracies’ one-day strikes.”

It explained: “The direction of the class struggle inescapably points to this: Macron must go, and the French executive presidency with its vast anti-democratic powers must be abolished. While struggling to bring down Macron, moreover, the working class must fight to develop rank-and-file committees of action, to lay the basis for what will replace his regime.”



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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