

Macron names Barnier to lead right-wing French government backed by neo-fascists

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Yesterday, after an unprecedented seven weeks of talks with members of the parliamentary parties since the July 7 elections, President Emmanuel Macron named Michel Barnier prime minister. Barnier will now try to select a ministerial cabinet that can win the support of the majority of the National Assembly.

Macron's selection of Barnier, a member of the discredited, right-wing The Republicans (LR) party, tramples upon the elections and installs the far right at the center of official politics. Jean-Luc Mélenchon's New Popular Front (NFP) won a plurality in the July 7 elections, with 182 seats. Macron's Ensemble coalition won 163 seats, and the far-right National Rally's (RN) 143, only because the NFP endorsed Ensemble candidates, supposedly to stop a RN victory.

Having preserved his party from collapse with Mélenchon's support, France's widely-hated president has now named a right-wing prime minister who would rule with far-right support. LR and Ensemble together control only 233 seats in the Assembly, and Barnier is well short of a 289-seat majority in the 577-seat National Assembly. Yesterday, however, RN officials indicated that they played a central role in selecting Barnier and would, at least initially, support his government.

A Macron-Barnier government would impose violently right-wing policies and, sooner rather than later, provoke mass opposition in the working class. It is committed to policies that face opposition from an overwhelming majority of the French people, above all in the working class—notably escalating the NATO war in Ukraine by sending troops to fight Russia, and continuing attacks on pensions and social spending.

Barnier is a 73-year-old European Union (EU) bureaucrat known mainly as the EU's representative in Brexit talks with Britain. He is a partisan of strict austerity and corporate tax cuts. He denounces social spending for creating "entitled people," and opposes renewable energy.

He has proposed a further one-year rise in the retirement age, beyond the two-year increase to 64 that Macron imposed in 2023, despite overwhelming popular opposition and mass strikes.

Barnier has adopted violently anti-immigrant, xenophobic positions, especially since the Brexit talks. In 2021, he called for a five-year ban on immigration into France, claiming that otherwise "there will be more Brexits." He demanded "liberty of maneuver" for France to violate EU rules on immigration, and appealed to the police, demanding that immigration decisions be taken out of the hands of "people smugglers and judges."

Having spent much of his career in the EU machine in Brussels, near NATO headquarters, Barnier also is a partisan of NATO. During the war in Ukraine, he has criticized policies of EU and French military autonomy advanced earlier by Macron, hailing NATO as a "pillar" of European defense.

The Elysée presidential palace announced Barnier's nomination in a perfunctory communiqué, stating that Barnier would "build a government of unity serving the country and the French people," aiming to "be as stable as possible and to have the best chances to create the broadest unity."

Yesterday, RN officials made clear that they played a key role in the selection of Barnier, and that they would keep his government afloat, as long as it carries out policies acceptable to them.

RN leader Marine Le Pen told a press conference at the Assembly: "We demanded a certain number of conditions, namely that we have a prime minister that would respect RN voters. ... I believe that Mr. Barnier fulfills that criterion. As for other things, on substantive issues, we will wait and see what the statement of general policy of Mr Barnier will bring, and the way in which he carries out the necessary compromises on the upcoming budget."

The Belgian establishment daily *Le Soir* the RN “is the arbiter in the new legislature,” while the *Courrier International* wrote that “Barnier was the only name [Le Pen] did not immediately veto.”

The announcement of a Barnier government backed by the RN tramples the election results underfoot. Masses of workers and youth voted for NFP candidates, or for Ensemble candidates backed by the NFP, in order to block the coming to power of a far-right government. Under conditions where overwhelming majorities of the population oppose further pension cuts, the genocide in Gaza and military escalation against Russia, there were broad expectations that the vote would compel a shift in policy.

It is apparent that during the seven weeks of negotiations that followed the elections, Macron and the neo-fascists were engaged in constant plotting on how to continue the reactionary political agenda of the previous Macron government.

The NFP and allied trade and student unions have called nationwide protests tomorrow against Macron’s theft of the election. While a movement must be built among workers and youth against Macron, this poses profound questions of political perspective and orientation before the working class. Indeed, workers cannot fight war, genocide and social reaction on a national, purely “democratic” basis, by putting pressure on Macron to respect the election result and name a prime minister who would serve under him.

What faces workers in France, and in every country, is a deepening global war, attacks on social and living conditions, and police-state regimes rooted in an international crisis of capitalism. This cannot be resolved through appeals to national capitalist governments, who now brazenly display their fascist sympathies at home and support for war and genocide abroad. There is nothing to be negotiated with them.

Indeed, the naming of the Barnier government amounts to an exposure of the bankruptcy of Mélenchon and his France Unbowed (LFI) party. He formed the NFP as an alliance with the big business Socialist Party (PS), the Greens and the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF) that backed Macron in the elections. It refused to make any appeal to mobilize its voters, particularly in the urban working class, in mass strikes and protests against Macron’s far-right plotting. It thus played a central role in facilitating Macron’s installation of a far-right-backed government.

Now, NFP politicians are attacking Macron and, in the

case of LFI, calling for participation in the September 7 protests. “The election was stolen from the French people. The message was ignored,” Mélenchon tweeted, calling for “the most powerful possible mobilization.”

Macron “is continuing to live as an autocrat. By naming Michel Barnier, the president is refusing to respect popular sovereignty and voters’ choices in the ballot box,” commented Mathilde Panot, the head of the parliamentary delegation for Mélenchon’s France Unbowed (LFI) party. She called on her supporters to fight “this coup that is unacceptable in a democracy” by participating in the September 7 protests.

While the PS called to censure Macron, the NFP collectively issued a statement denouncing Macron’s “total contempt for millions of French people” who voted in the elections, and the “arrival in power of the National Rally and its ideas.” It reiterated its “solemn pledge during the election campaign” to form a government that would “break with Macron’s policies.”

The first task facing the workers, however, is to ensure that their struggles cannot be sabotaged by the pseudo-left parties and union bureaucracies of the NFP. The bitter example of last year’s struggle against Macron’s pension cuts, which the union bureaucracies shut down even as Macron faced overwhelming opposition, must be taken as a warning. Faced with a choice between a Macron government and a movement of the working class that threatens to bring down the police state, they will support Macron against the workers.

The critical question is building a movement of workers and youth against the Macron-RN alliance, independently of the NFP bureaucracies, based on uncompromising opposition to imperialist war, genocide and police-state reaction. This requires the construction of rank-and-file organizations of struggle among workers and youth, linking their struggles to the movement of strikes and protests internationally, based on revolutionary socialist opposition to the capitalist system.



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