

French Prime Minister Bayrou presents class war budget

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Yesterday, French Prime Minister François Bayrou presented plans for €44 billion in tax increases and social cuts in next year's budget. This class war budget would impose sweeping cuts to key social programs to free up tens of billions of euros for the ongoing French and European military build-up and the NATO war against Russia.

This exposes the support of forces like the New Popular Front (NFP) led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon for President Emmanuel Macron in last year's elections. The NFP allied with Macron, supposedly to block a coming to power of the far-right National Rally (RN) and force Macron to listen to the overwhelming opposition to austerity and military-police repression, like the mass strikes and riots against pension cuts and police killings in 2023. Though the NFP won the elections, Macron named right-wing prime ministers to power—first Michel Barnier, and now Bayrou.

The government the NFP thus helped install is now turning violently against the workers. As European governments slash social spending to rearm, these policies face explosive social opposition in France and across Europe. However, these cuts can only be stopped by drawing the lessons of the bankruptcy of the NFP and building a movement directly among rank-and-file workers and youth, aiming to take power out of the hands of a financial aristocracy that tramples upon the will of the people.

While 91 percent of the French people opposed Macron's 2023 pension cuts, Bayrou is escalating austerity and diverting a further €4 billion to military spending. Bayrou called for at least €7 billion in cuts via a freeze to pensions and public sector salaries next year, €5 billion in healthcare spending cuts, and billions more from a draconian "reform" of unemployment insurance. He also announced mass job cuts in the public sector and sharp regional government spending cuts.

Bayrou presented two lying arguments to justify his anti-democratic policies. The first is that France, whose sovereign debt has reached 114 percent of its Gross Domestic Product and spends €100 billion yearly on servicing its debt to the banks, has no choice but to escalate

the exploitation of the workers. The second is that violent foreign enemies led by Russia give France and its allies no choice but to arm in order to defend themselves. On this point, Bayrou said:

Above all, the main transformation we have lived through is that violence has become a universal law. This change that began by the invasion of Ukraine by the armies of Putin's Russia, the world has shown it in other ways after October 7, with the drama in Gaza, that the world is ready to explode, and news is regularly reported of similar movements in the seas around China. And we recently saw with the Israel-Iran conflict that this is now becoming a general law, unfortunately, for all the regions of our planet.

One fact gives the lie to Bayrou's argument for militarism and austerity: France and its NATO imperialist allies are not innocent bystanders in these conflicts but the powers most aggressively inciting up. Russian forces invaded Ukraine in 2022 after the NATO powers armed Ukraine to the teeth for use as a military base against Russia. The Gaza genocide and Israeli strikes on Iran are continuing because NATO countries led by Washington, and including France, massively provide arms to Israel.

Now that the NATO powers have stoked up these conflicts, including by dispatching warships halfway around the world to threaten Chinese shipping lanes, Bayrou cynically argues that France has no choice but to impoverish the workers in order to fight back against the foreign threat. This lie only shows that defending workers' social rights requires opposing NATO wars.

Bayrou's argument about debt was similarly a lie. France faces a mortal debt trap, he arrogantly charged, as French workers supposedly became lazy and relied on the state to solve their problems: "We have become addicted to public spending. There was no problem, change, obstacle our

country faced—sanitary, climate-related, energy, or family issues—to which state officials and the citizenry did not react with a single response in their mouths: to turn to the state.”

Bayrou refused to explain how this has occurred. Referring to historian and resistance fighter Marc Bloch’s celebrated work *Strange Defeat*, on the French general staff’s stand-down amid the 1940 Nazi invasion of France, he said: “I won’t go over again the question of public finances and the long history of this strange defeat, as Marc Bloch said in another epoch. For over 50 years, our country, whatever political tendency was in power, has not presented a balanced budget. ... I believe it’s the last stop before the edge of the cliff and being crushed by debt.”

In reality, responsibility for the surge in France’s public debt to 114 percent of GDP lies not with the working class but the bourgeoisie. France’s debt surged in the years after the 2008 economic crash and the 2020 outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The European Central Bank printed trillions of euros of public money and loaned it to European governments, who spent it overwhelmingly in the form of bank bailouts of the super-rich.

This led on the one hand to the consolidation of a grotesquely wealthy French capitalist oligarchy, led by figures like Bernard Arnault or François Pinault with net worths of over €100 billion, and on the other, to massive state indebtedness and relentless attacks on the workers.

As this ruling class now claims that saving its wealth requires draconian austerity in violation of the will of the people, it only shows that it is historically condemned and unfit to rule. If its wealth, accumulated through the looting of public funds, is incompatible with social programs essential to the well-being of the population, then it must be impounded. Firms in France and across Europe that benefited from these bailouts should be nationalized under workers’ control, as they are effectively already funded by the public purse.

Such a regime, based on workers’ control of industry and capable of opening the path towards workers’ power and the implementation of socialist policies, is emerging ever more directly as the only practical alternative to the financial aristocracy’s looting of society. Significantly, Bayrou spent a considerable part of his speech insisting that there is no alternative to his policy and that all resistance to the diktat of the banks is futile.

Bayrou cited the 2015 capitulation of the NFP’s Greek allies, the pseudo-left SYRIZA (“Coalition of the Radical Left”) government. SYRIZA’s capitulation to the banks’ speculation against Greek sovereign debt, he claimed, showed that it is impossible to oppose austerity if the state is indebted:

We must never forget the example of Greece. The prime minister a while ago was called Alexis Tsipras, he headed a coalition called SYRIZA, of the left and far left. To avoid the obstacle [of the debt], he called a referendum of the Greek people to officially say no and refuse the spending cuts demanded by the European Union and the IMF. This “no” referendum, Alexis Tsipras handily won it on Sunday, but on Thursday four days later, he was forced to sign everything demanded of him.

In reality, opposition to austerity in Greece was defeated not because the workers could not fight but because of the treachery of SYRIZA and allied union bureaucracies. Like the parties and union bureaucracies making up the French NFP during the 2023 mass strikes against Macron’s pension cuts, they rejected an appeal to mobilize the working class in their country and across Europe to take power out of the hands of the capitalist oligarchy.

A socialist revolution is in the final analysis the only viable policy, and the critical question is building a movement among workers and youth across Europe that can prepare and ultimately carry it out. This means building independent, rank-and-file organizations of struggle among workers and youth in France and across Europe and internationally, and building a movement for Trotskyism and socialist revolution in opposition to forces like SYRIZA and the NFP.



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