

France's Bayrou government set to fall in September vote, as strikes against austerity loom

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At his August 25 press conference, Prime Minister François Bayrou said he will demand a vote of confidence at the National Assembly on September 8 on his austerity budget. Under the terms of Article 49.1 of the French constitution, Bayrou must resign and his government will collapse if he loses such a confidence vote.

Bayrou's program of €44 billion in austerity measures targeting pensions, healthcare, education and unemployment insurance is deeply unpopular. Moreover, Bayrou has tried to justify his social cuts, apart from citing the need to repay France's creditors in the banks, by calling for the massive diversion of resources to the military to prepare for high-intensity warfare. The French people reject this policy, and polls have found 84 percent opposed to Bayrou's program.

Bayrou's maneuver is politically suicidal, and his government is now set to fall even as work stoppages against his austerity policies are called by numerous professional organizations, and France's trade union bureaucracies are calling for a one-day nationwide strike on September 10.

Since last year's election, President Emmanuel Macron and successive governments led by Michel Barnier and then Bayrou have only enjoyed the support of a minority in the Assembly. Jean-Luc Mélenchon's France Unbowed (LFI) party and the neo-fascist National Rally (RN) had already called to bring down the Bayrou government with a no-confidence vote.

Moreover, after Bayrou spoke, LFI's allies in the New Popular Front (NFP)—the bourgeois Socialist Party (PS) and its political satellites, the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF), and the Greens—suddenly shifted their position. While they had previously issued contradictory signals about possibly supporting Bayrou's budget, they swung against him.

PS General Secretary Olivier Faure told “François Bayrou has decided to leave. In the current conditions in parliament, he knows he cannot get a vote of confidence from the opposition parties. This is a self-dissolution [of Bayrou's own government]. He thinks he is doing it with the panache of someone who is already thinking about a new stage of his political life. It is obviously inconceivable that the PS could vote their confidence in the prime minister.”

The general secretaries of the PCF and of the Greens, Fabien Roussel and Marine Tondelier, both also said their parties would vote to bring down Bayrou.

Bayrou's Democratic Movement (MoDem) and the PS, two longtime fixtures of French bourgeois politics, have precipitated a major political crisis. Without the PS and its allies, Bayrou can hope to obtain at most a minority of 210 votes in the 577-seat Assembly on September 8. Commentary magazine *Le Point* called Bayrou's Monday press conference “political suicide on live TV, a kamikaze operation that stunned and left perplexed even certain of his own ministers.”

A main and likely deciding factor was fear in the capitalist oligarchy of an explosive strike movement in the working class and social protests by layers of the middle class. Indeed, the national associations of pharmacists and taxi drivers have called for work stoppages starting September 1 and 5. Electricity and gas workers will strike on September 2, and rail and mass transit unions have announced a strike on September 10.

Moreover, a group of French union bureaucracies, including the Stalinist-led General Confederation of Labor (CGT), Workers Force (FO) and Solidarity, have called for a nationwide one-day strike on September 10, under the title “Let's Stop Everything.”

Bayrou's maneuver appears intended to soften working

class anger and prevent this movement from rapidly erupting into a general strike. The ruling class is relying here on the services of the union bureaucracies, who have announced no plans for continuing nationwide strike action against Bayrou. The leadership of France's largest union, the PS-linked French Democratic Labor Confederation (CFDT), met last night and announced no concrete strike plans. They will meet again with the CGT and other unions on September 1.

There is little doubt, however, that Bayrou's decision to risk the collapse of his government was not dictated purely by national considerations.

The international situation and the political crisis in the United States in particular have undermined Macron and Bayrou. Trump's attempts to negotiate a peace deal between Ukraine and Russia and the European Union's (EU) humiliating agreement to Trump's trade war tariffs were major setbacks for Macron. Macron had called on the EU powers to intervene militarily in Ukraine against Russia and oppose Trump's tariffs, while Bayrou had justified austerity based on claims it was necessary to fund war with Russia.

The collapse of the framework Macron and Bayrou developed to justify the basic policies of French imperialism does not mean, however, that these essential policies are changing. With France facing a debilitating sovereign debt of over 114 percent of its GDP and desperate to militarily secure its access to markets and raw materials amid mounting global war, the bourgeoisie intends to double down on austerity, militarism and police-state repression.

Bayrou's resignation will not end the political confrontation between the capitalist oligarchy and the working class. It is in this context that one can understand the political content not only the ruling elite's rapid swing away from Bayrou but also the growing calls from both Mélenchon's LFI and the neo-fascist RN for the removal of Macron.

Last night, in a prime-time TFI television interview, RN party President Jordan Bardella said Macron should dissolve parliament "or resign ... to get out of this political dead end." He said that the RN is ready for either "the framework of a victorious legislative election or of a presidential election."

It is Mélenchon, however, who has campaigned most aggressively for Macron's removal, either by a parliamentary impeachment vote or by placing pressure on Macron to resign. Mélenchon appeared on France Inter radio yesterday to again raise this demand.

Mélenchon applauded the right-winger Bayrou, saying his decision to submit to a confidence vote was "dignified." Bayrou, he added, "is not responsible for the situation he finds himself in. ... It is those who preceded him, by their bad economic policies, their bad management, like Macron. So if there is one person who is responsible, it is the president." Mélenchon then called for a "general strike," as "we are in a bifurcation in the history of France and we are actors in this bifurcation." On this basis, he called to "impeach" Macron.

The working class must be warned against the dubious maneuvers of Mélenchon. What is most striking about his remarks is what he is not saying. He has not repudiated the NFP's calls to send troops to Ukraine or for a massive military and police build-up of the French state. Moreover, even though the RN currently leads LFI in the polls, he is not making any appeal to mass opposition in France to far-right repression, like that Trump is now launching against US cities.

The perspective Mélenchon offers, of strikes aiming only to strengthen him in his parliamentary maneuvers, is a political trap for working class opposition to imperialist war, austerity, police state repression and atrocities like the Gaza genocide.

The crisis in France can only be resolved on a progressive basis by building a revolutionary movement in the working class, mobilizing rank-and-file workers independently of the union bureaucracies linked to Mélenchon's NFP. By linking their strikes to those of workers across Europe, in the United States and internationally who are also entering into struggle, this will open a path towards stopping militarism and austerity, taking political and economic power out of the hands of the capitalist oligarchy.



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