

Macron calls to impoverish French workers by keeping wage rises below inflation

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In an interview Wednesday evening on France2 television, President Emmanuel Macron set the course for his second term. Citing NATO's war with Russia in Ukraine and its expansion into Europe, he refused to index French wages to the rapid inflation that is devastating the global economy and promised to slash pensions by raising the legal retirement age to 65.

With 500 French people dying every week from COVID-19, and a new deadly wave expected this winter, Macron did not mention any measures to stop the contagion.

His interview confirms the Marxist warning that imperialist war abroad goes hand in hand with class war against the workers at home. As over 10 percent inflation staggers Europe, Macron's refusal to raise wages and his attack on pensions are evidence of his plan, shared by all the capitalist states of Europe, to massively reduce living standards. As during the two world wars of the 20th century, the capitalist system works for the immiseration of the working class.

Macron first linked his desire to increase the cost of living to the supposedly inevitable return of war to Europe. "The war that is returning to Europe has multiple consequences. On energy, we were afraid of not having enough this winter. We managed to get by. On prices, it affects the lives of many compatriots," said Macron, before predicting a massive increase in the cost of energy: "For households, we will continue to help by adapting things. [Nevertheless] there will be a 15 percent increase in the first months [of 2023] for electricity and gas."

While inflation in France is already at 7 percent and will rise in 2023 due to the rising cost of energy, Macron refused to defend purchasing power by raising wages to at least the level of inflation.

"The solution is not to re-index wages to inflation ... I don't want to be demagogic, I'm not here to say we're going to re-index, otherwise we would destroy hundreds of thousands of jobs," Macron said. He added, "If we want to move forward, we have no choice but to work more."

To force workers to work more while earning less per hour worked, Macron proposed attacking pensions and unemployment insurance: "Today, there is not a serious expert who tells you that your pensions are funded. So, from the summer of 2023, we will have to shift the legal retirement age by four months a year. So, by 2025 we'll go to 63, by 2028 to 64 and by 2031 to 65."

Unsurprisingly, Macron then detailed measures aimed at reducing some of the shock of these measures on the most vulnerable workers and businesses. He announced state subsidies for businesses, particularly small businesses such as energy-intensive bakeries, and the extension of one-euro meals to slightly wider layers of students. But this will not offset the impact of inflation on the collective purchasing power of the working class, including rising prices for imported goods.

Macron has indicated that he will impose misery on workers under cover of nationalism, by stirring up fascistic hatreds against immigrants. Hypocritically claiming he would "never make an existential link between immigration and insecurity," he made that link three seconds later, saying, "But I want to fight against illegal immigration. When you look at the delinquency in Paris, where there is a high concentration of this illegal immigration, yes, delinquency is very present."

He boasted that he had "succeeded in sending home 3,000 illegal immigrants who were disturbing public order."

At the same time, Macron himself admitted that he had no French solution to the crisis in global capitalism. Inflation, he said, is “the consequence of our dependencies, we have controlled it better than many of our neighbors. The crisis we are passing through leaves €85 billion less in revenue for the nation because gas has gone up, electricity too, and all this has spread to all economic sectors, and we must submit to this shock.”

Macron's adoption of a strategy of war, immiseration and fascistic repression raises the most serious political and historical questions for workers. The first is breaking with the narrow national framework of struggle proposed by the trade union bureaucracies, which subordinate strikes and workers' struggles to their negotiations with Macron. But there is nothing to negotiate with Macron, whose policies run counter to the fundamental interests of working class.

The task facing the working class is to align its modes of struggle and perspectives with the challenges posed by an explosive objective situation. The nationalist, corporatist perspective of the trade union bureaucracies, to negotiate with the capitalist state and the bosses, leads to disaster. Only the formation among the workers in France and throughout the world of rank-and-file committees, independent of the national bureaucracies and taking the class struggle out of their hands, will make it possible to lead the necessarily international struggle against inflation, the pandemic and war.

This struggle can only be waged consciously by building a movement to transfer power to the workers through a socialist revolution.

The isolation of the current refinery strike in France by the ex-Stalinist General Confederation of Labor (CGT) bureaucracy is a warning. The CGT and its political allies such as the Communist Party, Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Unsubmissive France and Olivier Besancenot's Pabloite New Anti-capitalist Party are not only unable to defend wages. All the political parties and trade union bureaucracies historically linked to Stalinism, which blocked a revolution during the struggles of resistance to fascism in World War II and during the general strike of May 1968, will work to strangle workers' struggles in the 21st century.

The Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 neither signaled the end of the struggle for socialism by the working class, nor resolved the mortal crisis of capitalism. However, simply declaring that this crisis exists without then fighting to break the influence on the working class of those national bureaucracies that negotiate with Macron means to work within the context of the political debate within the ruling elite, or even within the Élysée presidential palace.

Indeed, in an interview with the British magazine *Economist* in 2019, Macron admitted that Washington's threats of war against Moscow were a sign of a deadly political crisis. “What we are seeing, I think, is that NATO is brain dead,” he said, before adding, “When the United States is very harsh with Russia, it is a form of governmental, political and historical hysteria.”

In fact, Macron himself is politically brain dead. Just three years later, he and the other NATO leaders are waging war on Russia in Ukraine, risking nuclear war. In 2019, he had added, “There was a pervasive conception that developed in the 1990s and 2000s around the idea of the End of History, an endless expansion of democracy, that the Western camp had won ... [Then] a series of crises showed that it was not true.”

Current events vindicate the line defended by the Socialist Equality Party and International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI). In a deadly crisis of capitalism, which is teetering on the brink of economic crash and nuclear war, only a break with the national bureaucracies and a unified struggle by the international working class, carried out based on the ICFI's defense of the continuity of Trotskyism, will make it possible to defend the vital interests of the working class.



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