

# French far-right government threatens to impose militarist austerity budget by decree

Anthony Torres, Alex Lantier  
29 October 2024

President Emmanuel Macron is threatening to impose the French state's 2025 budget without a parliamentary vote, by decree. Barely a year after Macron did this to impose massively unpopular pension cuts despite mass strikes and protests, this exposes the accelerating disintegration of French democracy, as the government loots the workers to pursue policies they overwhelmingly reject.

The budget is naked class rule. It cuts €60 billion, with €40 billion in social cuts and €20 billion in tax hikes, including €5 billion targeting working class families. At the same time, it keeps the tens of billions in military spending increases Macron imposed amid NATO's war with Russia in Ukraine. It tramples upon the opposition of 91 percent of French people to Macron's pension cuts, and of a similarly massive majority to his calls to send troops to fight Russia in Ukraine.

Macron's threats not only expose his fascistic minority government, which relies on tacit support from Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally (RN) in parliament. It also exposes Jean-Luc Mélenchon's New Popular Front (NFP), whose officials are calling to rewrite some of the budget's provisions in the National Assembly. Having stupidly backed Macron's candidates in this summer's elections, falsely claiming Macron would stop the far right, they are now presenting amendments in parliament—while Macron prepares to do an end run around parliament altogether.

The only force that can stop military escalation and relentless attacks on living standards and social rights is the working class. The enormous opposition that exists to military escalation and social austerity among workers not only in France but across Europe and internationally must be mobilized in struggle, independently of the NFP and its affiliated union bureaucracies.

Last week, in a meeting of the Council of Ministers with Macron, Prime Minister Michel Barnier asked for and

reportedly received permission to use Article 49-3 of the Constitution, to ram through the budget by decree—without the vote in the Assembly currently expected in December.

Since then, the government tried to downplay this politically explosive revelation. “The objective of the prime minister in unchanged. It is to let the debate go all the way, respecting the parliament,” government spokeswoman Maud Bregeon claimed. This reflects not Macron's strategy, however, so much as his fear of explosive opposition in the working class.

A BFMTV-Elabe poll found that, even in the early stages of the budget debate, 58 percent of French people consider that the use of Article 49-3 would be unacceptable. This anti-democratic article of France's Constitution allows the government to compel the Assembly to accept the budget without a vote, unless the Assembly votes a motion of censure against the government to force new elections.

Another possibility, government officials have told the press off the record, is to ask the Senate to rewrite the budget to undo whatever changes the Assembly has made. The Senate, an unelected body, is dominated by the right-wing The Republicans (LR) party that is part of the Barnier government, though it has now collapsed over the last decade to a rump in the Assembly. The Senate is expected to produce a right-wing budget along the lines demanded by Macron and the banks.

In either case, the ruling class is determined to slash living standards and build a military-police regime. Among the plans circulating are: eliminating inflation adjustments to pensions until July; massive hikes in prices of electricity, medicine and supplemental medical insurance; cutting 4,000 teaching jobs; cutting paid sick days; and slashing national financing of regional social programs. The only departments to receive a real increase in spending are the interior ministry and the armed forces,

at 8 and 7 percent, respectively.

Behind Macron stands not only the French ruling class, but the French state's major creditors in the American and European financial aristocracy. The Fitch and Moody's ratings agencies have both signaled that they may cut France's credit rating, driving up its borrowing costs on global financial markets, if they conclude the French state budget does not cut spending deeply enough, or that the political situation in France is unstable.

"Attention will turn towards the parliamentary debate and the ratings agencies," wrote analysts at France's Postal Bank as Fitch downgraded its perspective on French debt from stable to negative, though it did not change the rating itself, at AA-

The French state is in reality bankrupt, with a staggering €3.23 trillion sovereign debt, or 112 percent of France's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Similarly, the sovereign debt ballooned to 140 percent of GDP for Italy, 105 percent for Spain, and 122 percent for the United States.

It is not, however, for workers to pay this debt, accrued via catastrophic mismanagement over an entire epoch by the capitalist class—not only in France, but across Europe and internationally. Its causes are massive state-financed bank and corporate bailouts of wealthy investors, the collapse in taxation of the wealthy, and the massive diversion of public spending to war. These have unfolded alongside a catastrophic collapse in the living standards of working people.

Over the last 20 years, the French sovereign debt tripled while the wealth of just the wealthiest 500 French people multiplied tenfold to €1.2 trillion. This surge in private wealth was overwhelmingly driven by financial speculation, as the European Central Bank loaned trillions of euros in public funds to banks and corporations in a wave of bailouts in 2008, during the 2010s, and in 2020. The French state is bankrupt, the industrial fabric of France and Europe is devastated, and Frenchman Bernard Arnault (net worth €190 billion) is often cited as the world's wealthiest man.

Over this period, European Union countries collectively plunged hundreds of billions of euros into military spending increases, and also into a US-led war with Russia that has left Ukraine shattered and hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians dead. Macron's proposal earlier this year to send troops to Ukraine, even as Washington backed Israel's genocide against Gaza, epitomizes the bourgeoisie's suicidal recklessness. Having bankrupted France, Macron was proposing an operation that would open a path to global nuclear war.

The budget crisis in France shows this: society cannot afford either the wealthy, or the militarism of the NATO imperialist powers that threatens to blow up the planet.

An explosive struggle is brewing between the working class and the Macron government, which will escalate as the nature of this budget becomes ever more widely understood. In this struggle, the working class must be armed with a clear political program and perspective. Imperialist war and police-state repression must end, and the social needs of the population must be funded by impounding EU bailout funds and nationalizing the banks and corporations that received them.

The working class cannot fight for such a program alongside Mélenchon, LFI, the NFP and related union bureaucracies. They strangled the pension struggle last year, simply calling off strikes after Macron had rammed through his cuts. In this July's elections, they formed an election alliance with Macron, supposedly to keep the RN out of power, withdrawing their own candidates to help elect Macron's candidates. Totally oriented to maneuvers within the parliamentary machine with Macron, they will oppose a struggle by workers against war and to nationalize the economy.

This struggle will require a massive mobilization of rank-and-file workers, in organizations independent of the NFP and the union bureaucracies. In this fight, the best allies of workers in France are workers internationally. The essential precondition of such a struggle, however, is a clear understanding that there will be no simple, partial reformist solution to this crisis. The defense of the working class requires not a national revolution of the people as proposed by LFI, but a struggle for an international socialist revolution transferring power to the working class.



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

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