

French government crisis: Mobilize the working class to bring down Barnier and Macron!

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French Prime Minister Michel Barnier's minority government is on the verge of collapse. Its failure to find a parliamentary majority for its 2025 budget, which slashes social spending to divert tens of billions to the military and police, exposes its lack of any democratic legitimacy. An Elabe poll yesterday found that a majority of French people want the government to fall, and two-thirds want President Emmanuel Macron to resign.

The force that must be mobilized against the Macron-Barnier government is the working class. There is overwhelming popular opposition to their policies of austerity, war with Russia and support for Israel's genocide in Gaza. This opposition must find expression in the preparation and initiation of a movement of strikes and protests, aiming to bring down both Barnier and Macron.

Workers and youth cannot leave the organization of such a struggle to Jean-Luc Mélenchon's New Popular Front (NFP) and its allies in the union bureaucracies. Having played the decisive role in enabling Macron to set up the Barnier government after the July 7 elections, the NFP has threatened to bring down Barnier by holding a censure vote against him in the National Assembly. After the Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally (RN) shifted its position to oppose Barnier this week, such a censure motion might pass and bring him down next week.

Mélenchon is not, however, preparing workers for the political tasks that Barnier's fall will pose but lulling them to sleep. He is not mobilizing his voters against NATO's bombings of Russia that threaten nuclear war or plans for a French ground intervention in Ukraine. Nor is he warning that Trump's fascist program of global trade war, deportation of millions of immigrants, and multi-trillion-dollar attacks on social programs is a declaration of global class war on workers.

Instead of initiating a counteroffensive of the working class, Mélenchon is claiming Barnier's fall will resolve these issues on a national basis, through peace with Russia and a government backed by Mélenchon's own France Unbowed (LFI) party. He has asserted that Barnier will fall to a censure motion during the scheduled final 2025 budget debate in the Assembly. However, he only offers the perspective of supporting LFI-backed Finance Ministry bureaucrat Lucie Castets as prime minister in upcoming government talks:

Michel Barnier's government will fall between December 15 and 21. Until the head of state [i.e., Macron] decides to leave, the issue will be choosing the new head of government. For LFI, Lucie Castets is and remains our candidate for this position.

Mélenchon also criticized the decision of Washington and London to give the Ukrainian regime missiles to bomb Russia, as it cut across fast-approaching peace talks he predicted with Moscow:

Two missiles shot into the depths of Russia were intercepted. It's a major step towards total war. An absurd and criminal strategy of the Biden administration, coming on the verge of peace talks between Ukraine and Russia. Are the supporters of such folly ready to suffer retaliation?

Such simplistic, national parliamentary predictions are

utterly unrealistic. The NFP backs Castets, but it has a plurality and not a majority in the Assembly, where pro-Macron and RN deputies can band together to block Castets now, as they did this summer. And NATO is not preparing peace with Russia. Not only has Trump refrained from criticizing US-UK bombings of Russia, but Britain and France are moving to implement Macron's call to send ground troops to Ukraine.

Workers must be warned: Mélenchon has a record of reactionary and stupid policies leading to disaster. This year, he formed the NFP coalition with the big business Socialist Party (PS), the Stalinist French Communist Party, the Greens and the middle class Pabloite New Anti-capitalist Party. In the NFP program, Mélenchon agreed to support sending French troops as "peacekeepers" to Ukraine, strengthening riot police and intelligence services, and throwing criticisms of the Gaza genocide "into the river," as he said, to get PS support.

During the election, Mélenchon withdrew hundreds of LFI candidates to back PS or pro-Macron candidates, pledging the Macron-NFP alliance would stop the far right.

By subordinating workers to the "president of the rich," Mélenchon obtained precisely the opposite. He turned his back on the 91 percent of French people who oppose the pension cuts Macron rammed through last year despite mass strikes to fund the French military build-up, and a similarly massive majority opposed to total war with Russia. Instead, he helped get hundreds of pro-Macron or PS legislators elected.

Macron then tore up his alliance with Mélenchon after the elections, installing Barnier even though the NFP had won the most votes. Without a parliamentary majority for Barnier, Macron allied with the far-right RN, which agreed initially not to vote against Barnier. The NFP held one mass protest in September against this travesty of democracy, then surrendered to Macron, Barnier and Le Pen.

Now, Trump's election and the war escalation are driving a draconian, far-right restructuring of European politics. The German government fell the day after Trump's victory. Trump has named Elon Musk, the world's richest man, to head an office tasked with slashing \$2 trillion in state spending. As mass layoffs and plant closures mount in Europe, financial markets also began speculating on French state debt, on fears Barnier cannot pass a budget or repay France's €3 trillion debt.

This poses burning questions to French imperialism, as it moves to divert hundreds of billions of euros to war and

paying off the banks. Though the union bureaucracies ignominiously called off last year's mass strikes against pension cuts, they know they face explosive opposition. Can it restructure French politics and create conditions to, for example, name Bernard Arnault, France's wealthiest man, to run a state office like Musk's in America, tasked with destroying pensions and health care?

This week, as these issues were discussed in ruling circles, Le Pen suddenly withdrew RN support for Barnier, pledging to vote with the NFP to bring him down. Workers can give no confidence to such maneuvers. Le Pen is not setting into motion a rebirth of democracy and peace. The European bourgeoisie is setting into motion the most explosive confrontation with the working class since the last world war, 80 years ago, when Le Pen's political ancestors collaborated with Nazi rule over Europe.

There is only one viable policy for the working class in such a situation. A mass, insurgent movement must be built in the European and international working class, against imperialist war, genocide, fascism, and the capitalist oligarchy. Such a movement requires building organizations of struggle directly in the rank and file, independent of the labor bureaucracies. The bureaucracies' bankrupt national policies cannot be allowed to smother workers' struggles.

Workers must reject plant shutdowns and social cuts justified by debt crises and calls to increase war spending. In fact, much of the debt was accrued via multi-trillion-euro bailouts of state funds given to the banks and major corporations by the state and union bureaucracies. The funds of banks or financiers who speculate against state debt to impose war and social attacks on the population must be impounded, and their operations nationalized under workers' control.

Such a movement can only be built based on a perspective of transferring state power to workers' organizations of struggle and replacing the bankrupt capitalist order with socialism, in Europe and internationally.



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