

French New Popular Front, neo-fascist RN poised to bring down Barnier government

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French Prime Minister Michel Barnier's government is set to fall today, on a motion of censure tabled by Jean-Luc Mélenchon's New Popular Front (NFP) and supported by the far-right National Rally (RN).

On Monday, Barnier had invoked Article 49.3 of the French constitution to try to impose the Draft Law on Financing Social Security (PLFSS) without a vote in the National Assembly. LFI (Mélenchon's La France Insoumise) and Marine Le Pen's RN thereupon both tabled censure motions in the Assembly. Le Pen and other RN officials have pledged to vote for LFI's censure motion, and Barnier is expected to fall when the vote is scheduled on that motion.

Legislators of the New Popular Front coalition—LFI (77 seats), French Communist Party (17 seats), Socialist Party (66 seats) and the Greens (38 seats)—plus the RN (124 seats) are expected to give the LFI censure motion a 332-vote majority in the 577-seat Assembly.

Workers must be mobilized in struggle to bring down Barnier and President Emmanuel Macron and must be warned that the censure of Barnier by itself will not resolve the problems they face. Two-thirds of the French people want Macron to fall. However, the censure of Barnier would not bring down Macron or give more power to working people. Rather, it would intensify struggles in the ruling elite over who would replace Barnier but continue his attacks on the working class.

Barnier's rivals in the Assembly do not have a fundamentally different policy from his on the great international conflicts driving his policies of austerity and repression inside France. None of them are fighting to end the NATO wars against Russia and the Middle East or to break the diktat of the financial aristocrats, who are speculating on French debt on the international financial markets by expropriating their fortunes.

After Barnier invoked Article 49.3, LFI parliamentary group leader Mathilde Panot said she had submitted an

LFI censure motion, citing the “political chaos” and “total dishonor of Macronism.” She denounced his “talks with the National Rally,” noting Barnier's decision to slash State Medical Aid (AME) for refugees in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to win RN to supporting his budget.

Shortly thereafter, Le Pen held her own press conference at the Assembly and announced: “As I am speaking to you now, an [RN] censure motion is being submitted, and we will vote to censure the government. ... Wherever these censure motions come from, whether there are one or many, we will vote for these censure motions, and above all, for our own.”

The official political debate in France is utterly unreal. With the exception of a few figures in the government parties, the entire political spectrum from LFI to the RN is denouncing pension cuts, drug and utility price increases, and other unpopular, reactionary measures in Barnier's budget. A superficial observer of the budget debate could be forgiven for concluding that the French capitalist establishment is somehow swinging rapidly to the left.

A shift to the left is not, however, what is taking place. None of the parties involved is proposing massive tax increases on the super-rich, repudiating France's vast €3 trillion debt or reversing military spending hikes for the French “war economy.” War and the enrichment of the financial aristocracy, for them, are to continue. But then their criticisms of austerity are just empty demagoguery, which they can engage in only because it is obvious Barnier's budget will not pass. None of their amendments or comments on the budget concretely commit them to anything.

But while it criticizes one or another particularly unpopular social cut, the RN leadership is coming out increasingly and openly in support of a hard-line policy of “structural reform” to slash the deficit. If this is done without massive tax increases on the wealthy, this can only mean devastating social cuts or tax increases for

working people. Indeed, across the Atlantic, Le Pen's allies in the incoming Trump administration are pledging to slash \$2 trillion in government spending.

This weekend, as she shifted her position towards definitely censuring Barnier, Le Pen called for deep "structural reforms" to balance the budget. "The last announcements of Michel Barnier are not financed by structural reforms. ... In its current form, Mr. Barnier's budget will trigger a financial crisis" and "worsen an already monumental deficit," she tweeted.

In the political establishment, desperate measures are being discussed to resolve the budget crisis, escalate the wars and hand over more wealth to the financial markets. One issue is what budget can be voted for in 2025. Since Macron dissolved the parliament in June, he cannot dissolve it until June 2025 and will have to write a budget with the current Assembly, fractured between the NFP, pro-Macron and RN factions.

The threat of a dictatorship is real. The deeply divided Assembly has less than a month to draft a new budget before 2025 begins or to vote to extend the 2024 budget into 2025. However, the 2024 budget, with its vast deficit, would face deep opposition from financial markets. If the Assembly failed therefore to either vote for a new budget or extend the old, there is speculation in the media that Macron might invoke Article 16 of the constitution to suspend parliament and rule by decree.

Any such policy would face explosive opposition in the working class. However, amid deepening global war and financial crisis, it is clear—with Trump's threats that America's recent elections could be its last, or the attempted military coup yesterday in South Korea—that the ruling class is actively considering dictatorship. The elementary duty of any Marxist tendency is to warn the working class on the need to mobilize against Macron-Barnier based on a program of opposition to imperialist war, austerity, dictatorship and capitalism.

Mélenchon is, on the other hand, trying to lull workers and youth to sleep. Arguing that the budget negotiations have shown that the National Assembly supports some of the pension increases and other limited social measures contained in the LFI election program this June, Mélenchon is demanding Macron resign so a progressive government can be formed. In a statement he read on X/Twitter, Mélenchon said:

LFI members and the New Popular Front proposed many amendments and proposals [to

Barnier's budget]. They came from a program, the one that the French people preferred in the June elections and that were often approved by the National Assembly itself [during the budget talks]. It is a break with the policies imposed by Mr. Macron since he has taken office, policies that spend their time enriching the rich and impoverishing the poor. ...

We are in a twilight zone from which it is high time to leave, because this country refused to give Mr. Macron's party a parliamentary majority, because the Assembly did not give its confidence to the government he named, and because there is no majority to adopt his budget. So the person who is responsible for this must face up to his responsibility. We must give power back to the people, within the respect of the rules imposed upon us by the Constitution. ... The president must resign.

But the Assembly, nearly two-thirds of which is made up of neo-fascist or pro-Macron legislators, is not fighting for a program of social reforms. It is organically an Assembly of police-state repression, austerity and imperialist war. To present its demagogic criticisms of Barnier as good coin and the basis for a progressive government if only a new president can be elected is to mislead the working class.

However the ruling personnel of the French bourgeoisie is reorganized after today's vote, it will not produce a genuinely democratic regime. Such a regime can only emerge from an international struggle in the working class against imperialist war and genocide in Gaza, and for the nationalization of the assets of the financial aristocracy—that is, from a struggle for socialism.



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