

French National Assembly brings down Barnier government

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Yesterday, a 332-seat majority of the National Assembly's 577 deputies voted to censure the Social Security budget (PLFSS) proposed by French Prime Minister Michel Barnier, bringing down his government. The vote was strictly along party lines: deputies of Marine Le Pen's National Rally (RN) and the New Popular Front (NFP) coalition led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon voted against Barnier. President Macron announced last night that he would begin a rapid search for a new prime minister.

It is a shattering defeat for President Emmanuel Macron. He dissolved the Assembly and called the July 7 snap elections, but they produced a hung parliament. Refusing to form a government with the NFP, which had received the most votes, he nominated a minority government of his supporters, led by Barnier, and obtained a pledge from the RN to support its policies in the Assembly. But as Barnier's budget came under criticism from financial markets and the press last week for not going far enough with austerity, the RN changed course.

The NFP had long threatened Barnier with censure motions, as he refused to include them in his government. However, the RN brought down Barnier by announcing last week that it would vote for the NFP's censure motion yesterday.

Workers justifiably despised the Barnier government, and the critical question facing workers is how to develop a political offensive after its collapse. It brought an unpopular budget imposing €60 billion in spending cuts, largely targeting social programs, while increasing military and police budgets as Paris threatened to send ground troops to Ukraine in defiance of popular opposition. Polls showed 52 percent of the French public wanted Barnier to fall, and 63 percent wanted Macron to resign.

A movement must be prepared and built in the working class to bring down Macron and halt his widely despised policies: plans for NATO war escalation against Russia, austerity policies like his massive pension cuts, police violence and support for the Gaza genocide. This cannot be left to the French capitalist establishment. The progressive way forward is building a movement from below, in the rank and file, basing itself on the class struggle.

As all the major NATO powers escalate war threats against Russia, and financial markets demand austerity not only in France but across Europe, it is clear that workers face not a national but an international struggle. This takes the most naked expression in the election of the fascist Donald Trump as US president. Pledging a staggering \$2 trillion in austerity measures, police round-ups of millions of immigrants, and escalation of war in the Middle East, he is set to massively expand class war on the workers.

Bourgeois politics internationally is being rapidly reshaped since Trump's elections: First the German government and now the French government have fallen in Europe, and on Tuesday there was a failed attempt to impose martial law in South Korea.

After the fall of Barnier, the French bourgeoisie is more and more overtly bringing forward the neo-fascist RN. Indeed, the first politician to give a prime-time television interview was RN leader Marine Le Pen; Macron and Mélenchon are to appear tonight. Appearing on TF1 evening news, Le Pen postured as a defender of the French people, an opponent of pension cuts and increases in costs of medicine, and a friend of the little man.

The sharpest warnings must be made about the political posturing of Macron's rivals in the ruling elite, including both the RN and the NFP. Le Pen's

politics are determined not by her populist demagoguery but, like Trump, by the escalating global war and economic breakdown of the world capitalist system. Absent a struggle by the working class against austerity and war, the next government will divert funds to servicing France's €3 trillion debt and escalating war against Russia in Ukraine and war in the Middle East, entailing massive austerity attacks on the workers.

Le Pen postured, however, as a friend of the people, stating: "I believe we had a choice to make, and the choice we made was to protect the French people. Mr. Barnier had made three promises: tax justice but he gave us a budget with €40 billion more in taxes; controlling public spending, but his budget increased the deficit; and building the budget with the opposition parties, but he ignored the opposition parties when he designed it. So this budget was toxic for the French people, and the only appropriate solution for those elected to protect them was to oppose this budget."

Asked if she aimed to compel the president to present his resignation after Barnier's collapse, she replied: "I do not demand Emmanuel Macron's resignation. I say that if there arrives a time when he does not take the path of respect of political parties and elections, the pressure on the president will obviously be ever stronger. But it is his decision."

In reality, it is clear that in ruling circles there is mounting discussion of Macron's removal due to the economic crisis caused by the failure to adopt a budget. France's borrowing costs have risen above those of Greece, as financial markets speculate on its sovereign debt. There are rising fears that, without a budget next year, financing of the healthcare system, of pensions, and of the public services may grind to a halt.

The budget negotiations will be explosive, as the Assembly is a hung parliament and legally cannot be dissolved for a year after Macron dissolved it last June. The budget will have to be negotiated in the hung parliament, which may deadlock again on budget votes.

Asked by *Le Monde* about whether she would press Macron to resign in such a scenario, to break the deadlock, Le Pen replied: "We will follow the normal functioning of the institutions. But if there is one government that falls, then a second, and a third, we will have to ask the question."

In the meantime, the RN is opening a press campaign calling for Macron's head. Vice President Sébastien

Chenu said: "I think Emmanuel Macron would do his country a favor if he left his office and allowed for a reshaping of a political line to serve France."

RN Europarliamentarian and Le Pen adviser Philippe Olivier commented, "Macron is a disgraced Republican monarch, advancing with his shirt open and a rope around his neck. ... We are not getting overexcited. We will discuss this once the demand for resignation, which is beginning to rise in our ranks and beyond, becomes massive. For the time being, Macron has to pick up the hot potato and deal with the problems."

The working class must mobilize and take up its own fight against Macron. Opposition to Macron cannot be left in the hands of the reactionaries in the RN or the NFP, whose program for the July 7 elections included reactionary calls to send ground troops to Ukraine and to increase funding for the police and intelligence services.

Neither NFP officials nor their affiliated union bureaucracies are calling to mobilize the working class in struggle against both Macron and the neofascists. Last night, the parliamentary fraction leader of Mélenchon's party, Mathilde Panot, briefly attacked Macron in vague populist terms after the NFP censure motion was adopted. "The only sovereign, in a Republic, is the people," Panot said. Denouncing the government's "dishonorable" attempt to cut deals with the RN, Panot said: "The government ultimately received both dishonor and censure."

The working class cannot, however, stop the policies of war, austerity and attacks on democratic rights that made Barnier and Macron so unpopular if its struggles are politically controlled by forces like Panot and Mélenchon. The critical question is the construction, in the working class in France and internationally, of a socialist movement against imperialist war and far-right reaction.



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