

The fall of the French government and the bankruptcy of the New Popular Front

Alex Lantier

5 December 2024

On Wednesday, Prime Minister Michel Barnier's unpopular minority government fell after the National Assembly censured its 2025 budget. This is a major political blow to President Emmanuel Macron, who assembled Barnier's government following snap elections in July. Public discontent is surging, with two-thirds of the French population now calling for Macron's resignation.

Macron is deeply despised. His brutal pension cuts, violent repression of mass strikes, calls to send French troops to Ukraine to fight Russia, and open support for the Israeli regime's genocide in Gaza have provoked overwhelming opposition. However, the political forces strengthened by Barnier's fall are not on the left, but on the right.

Barnier's government collapsed after Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally (RN) withdrew its support and backed a censure motion introduced by Jean-Luc Mélenchon's New Popular Front (NFP). French media are now lavishing attention on the RN, the foremost French allies of Israel's genocidal regime and America's fascist president-elect, Donald Trump. Le Pen's party is positioning itself as the decisive force in French politics, biding its time while signaling its readiness to topple Macron.

The strengthening of the far right amid Barnier's fall is a direct consequence of the bankruptcy of the NFP, which is seeking to paralyze workers. As he campaigns for Macron to resign, Mélenchon limits himself to calling on the National Assembly to support an NFP-led government, headed by Finance Ministry bureaucrat Lucie Castets.

Mélenchon won 8 million votes in the 2022 presidential elections, dominating working class neighborhoods in nearly all of France's largest cities. A strike movement mobilizing these voters could bring France's economy to a standstill. Yet not once in the last two years has Mélenchon called for, let alone organized, a mass mobilization to challenge Macron's repeated violations of popular will.

During last year's mass strikes against Macron's pension cuts, Mélenchon's party, France Unbowed (LFI), limited its intervention to attending trade union rallies and writing a pathetic letter politely asking him to reconsider. Millions

marched against Macron, and polls showed two-thirds of the French people wanted to halt the cuts with a general strike to block the economy. But the LFI was silent as the union bureaucracies halted protests once Macron's cuts were promulgated as law.

This year, following Macron's snap election call, Mélenchon formed the NFP—a coalition between his LFI, the big-business Socialist Party (PS), the Stalinist French Communist Party, the Greens and the middle-class Pabloite New Anti-Capitalist Party. This opportunistic alliance, with discredited figures like ex-President François Hollande of the PS, was based on a thoroughly right-wing program, including pledges to send troops to Ukraine and bolster riot police and spy agencies.

In the election, LFI withdrew hundreds of its own candidates to support PS and pro-Macron candidates, claiming this alliance would block the far right. Mélenchon thus helped get hundreds of pro-Macron or PS legislators elected. When the elections resulted in a hung parliament, Macron promptly discarded his alliance with the NFP and turned to the far-right RN, which initially agreed to support Barnier's government without formally joining it.

By blocking working class opposition to Macron and the bourgeoisie, the NFP strengthened Le Pen. It let her denounce the "left" as a tool of the banks and consolidate support among millions of workers who vote for the RN out of bitterness with the social attacks carried out by successive governments headed by the PS.

Last week, the RN abruptly withdrew support for Barnier, reflecting a broader global restructuring of bourgeois politics following Trump's election. In recent days, Ukraine has launched NATO-backed missile strikes on Russia, South Korea's president issued an abortive declaration of martial law, and both the German and French governments have collapsed. Trump's reelection, marked by plans for military escalation, mass deportations, and \$2 trillion in austerity measures, signals a coordinated global intensification of the bourgeoisie's class war on the working class.

In this context, pseudo-left parties like LFI serve to block

and disorient working class opposition, strengthening the far right. Indeed, during the 2022 elections, Mélenchon pledged to serve as prime minister under either Macron or Le Pen. His view of neo-fascism had shifted since the 1970s, he said: “At the very beginning of the struggle against the National Front [the predecessor of the National Rally], I took a very harsh position. Inspired by the past, I said we should not accept them ... Now the question is not posed that way for me.”

Amid a new plunge by capitalism into world war, genocide and far-right reaction, such remarks are monumentally reactionary and stupid.

The only way to halt the descent of capitalism into the abyss is through a socialist political offensive of the working class. To combat the ruling class’s agenda, strikes and protests must be organized and led by rank-and-file workers, advancing demands that directly express the immense social opposition brewing in society. The Parti de l’égalité socialiste, the French section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, puts forward the following urgent demands:

The bombing of Russia with NATO munitions and Macron’s call to send French troops to Ukraine threaten total war between nuclear-armed powers. NATO’s war against Russia and the Middle East, like France’s neo-colonial wars in Africa, must be stopped. The vast military budget Macron imposed last year, like the pension cuts that financed it, must be rescinded. France must leave NATO, as part of an international struggle of the working class to dismantle it.

Workers in France and across the globe must take immediate action to block the production and delivery of arms to the Israeli regime, which is carrying out a genocidal assault on Gaza. The repression of those who oppose this genocide—through bogus charges of terrorism or antisemitism—must end. All fines, prison sentences, and other punitive measures against protesters must be overturned. Israeli officials responsible for war crimes, along with French and NATO officials complicit in these atrocities, must be prosecuted before international tribunals.

France’s banks and corporations enforce their rule through violent police repression, mass arrests of strikers, and authoritarian laws. The 1958 Constitution’s executive presidency is the undemocratic nerve center of this repression, concentrating dictatorial powers that can suspend parliament and override basic rights. The struggle to end Macron’s regime must include a fight to abolish this institution, which—whether under Macron or the RN—threatens to become the foundation for a fascist dictatorship.

The ruling class seeks to divide workers through

nationalism. Workers must reject RN’s calls for mass expulsions and fight against anti-immigrant measures supported by Macron and the NFP, including EU laws denying asylum rights, mass detention camps, and France’s racist bans on Muslim religious clothing. The international working class must stand united against these policies, which mirror Trump’s fascistic plans for mass deportations. The defense of immigrants is a critical component of the struggle for global working class solidarity.

As mass layoffs mount and hundreds of thousands face job cuts across France and Europe, the stranglehold of the banks on society must be broken. Workers must reject the ruling class’s lie that there is no money to fund jobs, healthcare, and education. The resources for social programmes exist—they are hoarded by the financial aristocracy, which has plundered public funds through decades of bank bailouts. These ill-gotten gains must be expropriated and major corporations nationalized under democratic control to ensure that society’s wealth is used to meet human needs, not private profit.

The allies of workers in France opposed to war, genocide and social reaction are their class brothers and sisters internationally. French union bureaucrats and parliamentarians will argue for a national perspective and block a genuine struggle. The way forward for workers is to build their own rank-and-file organizations of struggle and a political movement to transfer power to the working class in France, across Europe and internationally, replacing the capitalist European Union with the United Socialist States of Europe.

The events in France and around the world demand a bold and revolutionary response from the working class. The path forward lies in breaking from the bankrupt policies of nationalism and reformism and fighting for the socialist transformation of society.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact