

Unrest Erupts in France After Macron Imposes Pension Reforms by Decree

Utilizing an obscure article within the constitution, the neo-liberal president subverted the processes of the National Assembly

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French workers and youth expressed their profound anger at the government in the wake of President Emmanuel Macron's actions related to the proposed changes in the pension system in one of Europe's leading states.

Article 49.3, which allows the president to pass a law without a vote by the National Assembly, was evoked by Macron before the final legislative approval of the new policy.

Macron directed Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne to by-pass the National Assembly vote forcing the measure into law. Borne was met with heckles after it became clear that there would not be a vote on the pension reform legislation.

The prime minister went on French television to condemn the disruptions in the National Assembly asserting that those who opposed the actions by Macron had no respect for the institutions of governance. The government has staked its political future on the passage of the pension reform legislation claiming that the current system was financially unsustainable.

The law would move the retirement age from 62 to 64 while requiring 43 years of employment in order to receive full benefits. For several months, French workers and students have engaged in widespread rolling strikes where oil, transport, education and other important sectors within the economy ground to a standstill.

For several days since the imposition of the reform bill by Macron on March 16, thousands of people have taken to the streets in mass demonstrations and rebellion. Several hundred people have been arrested amid renewed calls for strike action during the remaining weeks of March.

Two different motions of no-confidence were prepared by opposing political factions in the

National Assembly directed at removing Macron and forcing an election. However, the conservative Republican party within the National Assembly has openly stated that it will not support such a motion to remove Macron.

If the motions of no-confidence fail, a coalition of Left parties in the National Assembly say they will appeal the decision to the Constitutional Council. The existing government claims that they do not believe the motions will pass.

Government Efforts Prompted Militant Demonstrations and Strikes

Since January, striking workers have periodically blocked the departure of trucks carrying fuel to distribution centers. Schools also are deeply impacted by the unrest as both teachers and students staged stayaways.



French workers march through the streets against pension reforms (Source: Abayomi Azikiwe)

Sanitation workers are refusing to pick up trash leaving 10,000 tons of rubbish across in the streets of the capital of Paris. The government has forced some of the sanitation employees back to work utilizing their executive authority. Rats are swarming the streets of Paris at night to feast on the discarded food threatening an outbreak of disease. The much relied upon tourist industry in Paris and other areas of the country will surely be damaged as a result of the mounds of garbage in the capital and the lack of public transportation.

In a report on the situation published by Le Monde, [it says that](#):

“Police on Saturday (March 18) closed Paris’ Place de la Concorde opposite parliament for demonstrations following two successive nights of clashes. Some 122 people were arrested as some set rubbish bins on fire, destroyed bus stops and erected improvised barricades around a 4,000-strong demonstration in the capital. On Sunday (March 19), police arrested another 17 people as protesters invaded the Les Halles shopping complex in central Paris. Away from the streets of major cities, the CGT said Saturday that workers would shut down France’s largest oil refinery in Normandy, warning that

two more could follow on Monday. So far, strikers have only prevented fuel deliveries from leaving refineries but not completely halted operations.”

Public opinion polls in France indicate that two-thirds of the electorate oppose the pension reform legislation. Critics say the new policy would place a heavy burden on young workers, especially those in the child-bearing ages.

Workers involved in the demonstrations said they did not want to work until 64. One woman said that she was already exhausted due to her labor-intensive job.

[In another article](#) which appeared in the British Morning Star it says of the response of the workers:

“As night fell (March 16), police officers charged the demonstrators in waves to clear the square. Small groups then moved through nearby streets in the chic Champs-Elysees neighborhood, setting street fires. Similar scenes repeated themselves in numerous other cities, from Rennes and Nantes in eastern France to Lyon and the southern port city of Marseille, where shop windows and bank fronts were smashed, according to French media. French Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin told radio station RTL today (March 18) that 310 people were arrested overnight. Most of the arrests, 258, were made in Paris, according to Mr. Darmanin. The eight main trade union federations called for a new day of ‘strong mobilization’ against the plans next Thursday, March 23.”

Macron and his Renaissance political party, formerly known as Le Republique En Marche, approval rating has sunk to 28% of the French voters. In polls published by Le Journal du Dimanche and Le Figaro, those holding a negative view of the president accounted for 70% of the respondents.

French Policy Reflects Austerity Measures Enacted by Capitalist States

These developments in France are not taking place within a political and economic vacuum as the crisis of capitalism and imperialism deepens. Similar policies are being implemented in Britain where public sector unions have held strike actions in the transport, healthcare, education and home affairs service sectors.

The Conservative government of Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has introduced a budget in parliament which calls for even more draconian cuts within the public sector. Sunak inherited the crisis from four previous administrations in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum of 2016. The country has had five prime ministers over the last six-and-one-half years.

In the United States, dissatisfaction with the Democratic administration of President Joe Biden has resulted in an approval rating of 42%. Biden has failed to address the problems related to high rates of inflation not experienced since the early 1980s. Real wages have declined while the energy firms within the oil and natural gas sectors are reaping record profits.

A financial crisis has emerged in part due to the raising of interest rates in an attempt to curtail inflation. The current aim of the Federal Reserve Bank in the U.S. is to reduce inflation down to 2% annually. However, the refusal to impose price controls and raise the level of social spending is having a devastating impact on workers in the service and high-

tech areas of the national economy.

During early and mid-March, several banks have collapsed placing even more strain on the working class and oppressed. On March 13, after a tumultuous week characterized by the literal runs on Silvergate, Silicon Valley and Signature banks, Biden held a press conference to reassure people in the U.S. that their deposits were safe. The president claimed that negotiations within the financial industry brought about an agreement that the largest banks would provide the liquidity needed to prevent insolvency of the collapsed firms while ostensibly preventing further meltdowns.

These failed banks were involved in the financing of start-up businesses, tech firms and cryptocurrencies. In the tech and service sectors, there have been tens of thousands of layoffs in recent months. Although the monthly reports from the Department of Labor support the notion of a strong jobs market, inflation remains a serious challenge as well as the threat of a significant economic recession.

There is much speculation about possible “contagion” within the banking industry not only in the U.S. but around the world. The week of March 13 saw yet another institution, First Republic, reach a critical point of near collapse. Other banks agreed to provide \$30 billion in liquidity to First Republic yet these offers did not bring about a rise in the value of their stocks.

Stock markets have been marked by sharp volatility since the beginning of March. Over a period of two days in the first full week of the month, the leading banks based in the U.S. experienced \$52 billion of losses in the stock markets. See [this](#).

Then Credit Suisse, based in Switzerland, was facing a similar fate as their U.S. counterparts in California and New York. The Swiss National Bank over the weekend of March 17-19 agreed to in essence bailout Credit Suisse. On March 19, the Union Bank of Switzerland (UBS) made a decision in consultation with the finance ministry to acquire Credit Suisse.

All of this was undoubtedly designed to poise the financial industry for potentially even more volatility in the stock markets globally. Everyday there are repeated statements by treasury officials and banking experts in the western capitalist states that this crisis is different from the Great Recession which emerged full blown in 2008, resulting in millions of home foreclosures, job losses and the eventual bailing out of the banks utilizing the tax dollars of workers in the U.S. along with their deposits controlled by the Federal Reserve Bank which imposed several rounds of Quantitative Easing (QE).

Nonetheless, despite these proclamations which are based upon wishful thinking as opposed to objective analysis, there are key areas where the capitalist system remains extremely vulnerable in the present period. The U.S.-NATO proxy war in Ukraine has placed huge burdens on working people and farmers throughout Europe, North America and the world. A victory by the Russian Federation would create even more uncertainty in regard to the status of world imperialism.

The working class, youth and farmers in order to effectively address the burgeoning crisis will be required to organize independently. Capitalism has not been able to provide a solution to the conundrum in which it finds itself. This global situation provides the political openings to advocate on behalf of a transition to socialism where the national and international wealth which is produced by the proletariat and farmers can be utilized for

their benefit as a class.

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Featured image: French workers demonstrate in the streets against pension reforms (Source: Abayomi Azikiwe)

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