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France

# Against Macron's law: the battle is not over

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**After more than two months of strikes and demonstrations against the pension counter-reform, the National Assembly began debating the two government bills on 15 February. In an act of parliamentary guerrilla warfare, France Insoumise and the PCF had tabled 36,000 amendments to 81 articles of the first law (ordinary law) and a debate which was scheduled to end by 9 March at the latest. On Saturday 29 February, the Prime Minister, Edouard Philippe, according to a predictable scenario, used the shock parliamentary weapon for a government of the Fifth Republic: recourse to Article 49.3 of the Constitution. [1]**

This article allows the government to immediately suspend debate on a bill and to hold the government accountable. The law is therefore automatically considered adopted unless a motion of censure is passed by a majority of deputies. In 2017, the La République en Marche (Macron's party) obtained an overwhelming majority of 298 seats out of 577, not counting the 46 seats of Macron's MODEM allies, making any majority vote for a motion of censure illusory.

The motion tabled by the Republicans and that of the three groups PS, France insoumise and PCF were voted on 3 March and were obviously a minority vote. The second law (an organic law laying down the rules of financing) was adopted on 5 March.

The parliamentary process will therefore continue in April with a debate in the Senate and a return to the Assembly for a vote by the summer. For the next two months the confrontation surrounding this social attack will therefore remain at the heart of the social and political situation.

As soon as 49.3 was announced, hundreds of activists demonstrated outside the National Assembly and on Tuesday 3 March, the day of the vote of no-confidence motions, demonstrations were held all over the country with tens of thousands of people.

Popular disavowal has been crescendo in recent days. Several polls expressed a 70% rejection of the 49.3 government diktat and more than 60% of those polled declared their support for the motions of censure to bring down the government.

Similarly, the rejection of Macron's attack is still overwhelmingly in favour, rising to more than 60%, especially among young people and women and in areas where the standard of living of the working classes is lowest.

It is this opposition that is exerting real pressure on the majority party and has pushed it to use 49.3 to try to appear as a strong power capable of imposing its reforms.

In order to get elected and cement his party, Macron played a modernist, European, neo-liberal card, open to social issues, opposed not only to the extreme right but also to the conservative archaisms of the Republican and Socialist political class. He had thus been able to win support from voters sympathetic to both the Greens and the Socialist Party, who saw him as a protection against Marine Le Pen.

Of all this, there is almost nothing left today, LREM will pay the price in the municipal elections of 15 and 22 March and around Macron the prospect of the 2022 presidential elections seems risky.

Also, Macron would have liked in recent weeks to rebuild himself on the right on regalian themes and to surf on an Islamophobic campaign against "Islamist separatism".

The coronavirus epidemic has prevented this from happening. On the other hand, it cruelly highlights the catastrophic situation of the health system, already in asphyxiation before Covid 19. Many heads of hospital departments have reminded Macron of this in recent days.

At the same time, this epidemic highlights in France the counter-example of the USA, a country in which there is no federal public health system, leaving potential contaminated persons dependent on their private insurance. France still benefits from a system that allows free public health care at the antipodes of the neo-liberal model on which the counter-reform of pensions is based.

The pension law is therefore still a live issue. Social discontent is as deep as ever and the forces exist for a mobilization capable of bringing down Macron on this issue. The weeks of March will see a succession of demonstrations, starting on 8 March and continuing with mobilizations of the Yellow Jackets, those against racism and the opening of borders to migrants, the climate marches. In addition, at the beginning of April, the new provisions will be implemented, further restricting the rights of the unemployed.

On many issues, there is a wind of questioning in the country, starting with the rejection of violence against women and the complacency enjoyed by sexual predators, but also the rejection of the "lead climbers" praised by Macron, of whom Carlos Ghosn was the archetype. [2] Macron's world is cracking up, but there is no convergence, no social and political coherence around an anti-capitalist project, capable of breaking up false alternatives. The movement of the yellow jackets, like the one against the project of destroying pensions, highlights the needs for social justice, for the distribution of wealth, needs that are widely expressed within the working classes. These needs and mobilizations point to an obstacle to this justice and to the satisfaction of needs, the interest of capitalist and banking groups, of which Macron is the political representative. The convergences of these aspirations appear in all the mobilizations of the last few weeks and in several calls from the trade union and associative movement and the radical left without, however, the construction of a social and political front that is equal to what is at stake.

The further mobilizations of the coming weeks will all be points of support, but they alone will not be able to build up the confrontation with Macron, to lead a movement throughout the country similar to the one that began last December and January around the SNCF and the RATP. The national *Intersyndicale* has only given as a perspective a next strike day of on 31 March. Although late, this date could be the explicit starting point for a new offensive against Macron, new strikes in professional sectors and new blockading initiatives, and a national mass mobilization in Paris, before the law is definitively adopted. The combative sectors are the bearers of such prospects. The outcome of this confrontation will depend on the echo they obtain.

*7 March 2020*

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[1] See "[Macron forces through pension reform, step up the mobilization!](#)".

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[2] Carlos Ghosn, French former CEO and chairman of Renault-Nissan, was arrested on charges of corruption in Japan in 2018. He broke bail in January 2020 and fled to Lebanon where he also holds citizenship.