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France

Let's federate to “storm the heavens”!

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At a time when we are celebrating the 150th anniversary of the Paris Commune and its democratic and social aspirations, the French government is sinking into its authoritarian drift. More than ever, power is exercised by a minority that imposes its will on the majority. Financial interests continue to guide the choices of this government in a context of unprecedented health, social, ecological and political crisis, while reactionary offensives have multiplied in the run up to the June 2021 regional and departmental elections.

For more than a year, the health crisis has been accelerating the social crisis through widespread redundancies and job losses, an explosion of precarity and poverty but also provoking a democratic crisis with authoritarian and liberticidal policies. This government also persists in its lack of response to the ecological crisis – its “Climate and Resilience” law, which has been stripped of all content, is another illustration of this. It has to be said, unsurprisingly and despite the fine words, that for a year no significant change of course has been implemented. Indeed, the government continues its antisocial policies, destructive of social protection and public services, by persisting in its sweeping reform of unemployment insurance, which has become emblematic of this presidential term since the pensions reform was postponed (though far from abandoned).

At the same time, this government is giving a free rein to employers and financial interests, who have never paid so much in dividends to their shareholders and who lay off their employees for mere speculative reasons. While all economists are expecting an unprecedented wave of bankruptcy filings in the coming months and unemployment will explode, the CAC 40 groups will pay more than 51 billion euros in dividends to their shareholders while they continue to receive massive public aid (short-time working, emergency plans, recovery plan and so on) without any conditions or compensation in terms of jobs, tax or environmental matters. The likes of Bettencourt, Bolloré, Arnault, Pinault, Blackrock, Amundi and others will once again be the big winners of the crisis while front line workers, students, and the precarious sink into poverty.

Concerning the health crisis, this government is continuing to drift, with no other policy than that of continuing to increase profits. And vaccination management is another example. While the government is now making vaccination the be all and end all of its pandemic management, vaccines continue to be supplied in dribs and drabs by the trusts that manufacture and sell them at high prices rather than considering them a “common good of humanity”. This obviously requires the lifting of patents, but also the transfer of technology and the requisitioning of the pharmaceutical industry under social control.

Macron paves the way for Le Pen

The repressive, freedom-destroying and authoritarian policy of this government is not new, it has been one of its trademarks since it came to power. Macron is accentuating those policies that were already the prerogative of his predecessors on both left and right and is strengthening many security laws that have existed for several decades. This law and order policy, which destroys freedom, obviously aims to gag social protest by criminalizing it. This is how Interior Minister Darmanin, under the pretext of “disruption of public order”, has prohibited demonstrations of solidarity with the Palestinian people in Paris, Strasbourg and Nice.

The health crisis has been a fabulous pretext for the government to reduce democracy through ever more liberticidal laws: state of emergency, curfew, exit certificates, limitation of the right to travel and access to public places, banning demonstrations, regulation on public gatherings, total and partial lockdowns, thus installing an emergency regime that

has lasted for more than a year. But that's not all: it adopted a global security law that equates protesters with terrorists, to provide it with the “legal” means to control, deter or even prevent any expression of popular opposition. In this authoritarian, antisocial and demagogic drift, a new “anti-terrorism and intelligence” law is being prepared, reinforcing an already well-stocked security arsenal. These so-called emergency measures are gradually being incorporated into ordinary law, in the logic of a permanent state of emergency. Let us not forget either, in this period, the repression and police violence, the only political responses this government has to social protest. On 1 May, the police once again teargassed the trade union demonstration in Paris on several occasions.

Macron does not seem to want to draw a social and health balance sheet of the pandemic. And so that we avoid talking about his catastrophic management, he has found a diversion that is always a recipe: the “fight against separatism” which in fact is addressed only to Muslims. And unsurprisingly, the outbidding between members of the government, the right and the far right, relayed by all the reactionary media, has raged. But lest this diversion was not enough, Frédérique Vidal, Minister of Higher Education, has launched an investigation into the “Islamism” allegedly afflicting the universities. This was all that was needed to restart the machine of caricatures, stigmatization and accusations against organizations and personalities. And on several topics, it is increasingly difficult to distinguish between the discourse of Macron's La République En Marche (LREM), Les Républicains (LR) and Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement National (RN).

Far right gains confidence

Macron and his supporters are already campaigning for the 2022 presidential elections. And like Sarkozy in 2012, he has chosen to take on board the themes and discourse of the far right, thus claiming to be the best bulwark against Marine Le Pen coming to power. Thus, Darmanin goes so far as to denounce the “softness” of the RN leader. It is in this context that Action Française supporters forced their way into the Regional Council of Occitanie to denounce the “Islamist-leftists” who sit there, while fascists attacked a bookshop in Lyon and far-right activists attacked NPA members during the climate change demonstration on 9 May.

And it is obviously in this context that two op-eds from military figures were published a few weeks apart, in which authoritarian power and extreme violence are turned against a section of the population, stigmatizing it. Calls from police officers also say a lot about the political moment we are experiencing. But let us make no mistake, if the military can dare to publish such op-eds, if Action Française enters a regional council or fascists attack activists, it is because the government has for months instilled a reactionary climate to face the social crisis that has been accentuated with the pandemic. Today, the only beneficiary of this strategy is indeed the RN. And now supporting the theses of the RN or publicly joining its lists for the regional elections is no longer a problem or a taboo for some, as is the case with certain journalists, pseudo-trade unionists or millionaires.

The regionals and. the presidential election

While the first and second rounds of regional and departmental elections will take place shortly, it must be noted that these elections do not excite many people, especially workers, who consider that these elections will not change anything in their increasingly difficult daily lives. [1] But for some, these elections are important... one year before the presidential election.

Many elected representatives could more easily claim the nomination for 2022 after these elections, such as Xavier Bertrand, Valérie Pécresse or Laurent Wauquiez of Les Républicains. For LREM, the stakes are different: after his failure in the municipal elections of 2020, a new slap in the face a few months before the presidential election would

weaken Macron. But for him, it is also already a full-scale dry run for the presidential election, especially in the Hauts-de-France where Marine Le Pen, even if she is not a candidate, is strongly mobilized. This is probably why Macron parachuted his justice minister into this area.

For the RN, winning regions such as Hauts-de-France and/or PACA (Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur), one year before the presidential election, would prove its credibility on a very large scale and allow it to recover from its failure in the last municipal elections.

For the institutional left, the regional elections will also mark the start of the presidential election and both the Socialists and the Greens hope to confirm their results in the municipal elections. For these elections, their alliance strategy is one of variable geometry. Because what is currently obsessing the institutional left is obviously the presidential election. With a big problem: how to be in the second round when all the polls put Macron and Le Pen in the lead. We are therefore seeing a battle for hegemony between the various forces of the left. The battle rages on, with no component wanting to give up. The French Communist Party (PCF) has embarked on an identity-based candidacy that renews traditional discourses that mix social measures, recourse to the state, nationalism and an emphasis on security. Mélenchon has rejected the idea of a unity of the left and wants to be a candidate of the people. The EELV (Europe Écologie Les Verts - Greens) want the others to rally around them, the PS seems ready for such an alliance but the very weak result for Hamon's candidacy in 2017 is not a guarantee for them.

There are two major omissions in this discussion: firstly, on what programme? What is the balance sheet? A mystery! No big deal, unity seems, for them, to be enough. Mélenchon speaks of 1981 as a "suspended revolution", "why not until 2022?" whose betrayals, the turn to rigour from 1983, were caused by Europe and Germany. [\[2\]](#) In the current climate, nothing can be done from a search for unity on a reduced basis, without content, without appealing to the need for confrontation with the state and the ruling class. And this is the second major omission: this left does not want this confrontation! Even this patched-up left can no longer be credible, it no longer gives us hope for anything. Yes, we need unity, but unity in the struggles, in our mobilizations. Yes, we need a "left" but not that of the defenders of the current system, not the one that denies itself, not the one that is mistaken!

Impose an anti-capitalist rupture without waiting for 2022!

In this nauseating context, of health crisis, of social and economic crisis, the difficulties for workers, young people, the most precarious, working-class neighbourhoods in reacting and responding are real. But social protest does exist. Indeed, whether it is against redundancies, for employment, for public services, the climate, the bioethics bill, women's rights, against police violence, state racism, or for Palestine... the mobilizations exist. They are certainly still weak and dispersed, but they do exist. And for our part, without waiting for 2022, we believe that it is up to us to take our affairs into our own hands, without waiting for the "supreme saviour". Hope will come from our ability to act from below, on the streets, in the workplace... to federate our angers, our solidarity, our activist forces whether associative, trade unionist or political, and as in 1871 rise to "storm the heavens".

It is urgent not to give way in the face of the current wave, to build the necessary bulwarks with all those who are not resigned to the prospect of the worst, to bring to life solidarity and the prospect of another world in the face of the ongoing disaster. There is no inevitability to the rise of the far right and authoritarian powers, nor is there any inevitability to the economic and ecological crisis. On condition that the world of work raises its head, becomes aware of its strength, organizes itself to fight, coordinates itself and sets itself political objectives. We want to play our part in this, by defending and fighting for radical social, ecological and democratic emergency measures. By being present at the next presidential election, in continuity with the campaigns led by Olivier Besancenot and Philippe Poutou, in order to offer a voice to all these angers, in an approach that combines the need for a unitary response, mass

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struggles and a programme of rupture with capitalism.

Translated by **International Viewpoint** from [l'Anticapitaliste la revue](#) May 2021.

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[1] This article was written before the departmental and regional elections. See Anti*Capitalist Resistance [“French Regional Elections – seven things we learnt”](#).

[2] See l'Ere du peuple, blog of Jean-Luc Mélenchon [“1981. la révolution suspendue – Conférence sur la victoire de François Mitterrand”](#).