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Lebanon

Macron and Lebanon: “reforms” again and again

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While Emmanuel Macron is receiving the Egyptian dictator Abdel Fattah al-Sissi in Paris [see below for NPA statement on Sissi visit], the French president is continuing to be active on the Lebanese dossier to implement the “reforms” demanded by Paris and the World Bank in particular.

On 2 December, an international videoconference in “support of the Lebanese population”, co-chaired by the UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, and the French President, Emmanuel Macron, the World Bank, the European Union and the United Nations, presented the action programme entitled “3RF - Reform, Recovery, Reconstruction”. Originally scheduled for mid-October, this second conference follows the one held on 9 August, a few days after the explosion in the port of Beirut.

“Donations” against austerity measures

Officially, the plan is intended to target the urgent needs of the Lebanese population affected by the explosion at the port of Beirut on 4 August, and to support the recovery and reconstruction of the city. The cost of rehabilitating public infrastructure, excluding the port, between now and 2021 is estimated at between \$1.8 and \$2.2 billion. The reconstruction of the port of Beirut is not included, as it is to be the subject of a public-private partnership according to the bearers of the plan.

Within this framework, the presidents of the videoconference, led by Emmanuel Macron, have particularly insisted, once again, on the need to launch a programme of “reforms”. These “reforms” are based on the terms of the Paris conference of April 2018 which reserves more than 11 billion dollars in loans and grants for Lebanon in exchange for the Lebanese government’s commitment to develop public-private partnerships, reduce the level of debt and enact austerity measures.

For the implementation of these “reforms”, Macron and the other members of the videoconference reiterated the need for the rapid formation of a new government, following the resignation of the previous one in August. Former Prime Minister Saad Hariri was indeed appointed at the end of October to form a new government, but the process has still not been completed. In the absence of a government and the launch of the required “reforms”, Macron and his allies warned that the scope of the 3RF would be severely limited and that most of the “financial aid” would not be provided.

Hyperinflation

All this is taking place at a time when the country’s economic and financial situation is steadily deteriorating, accelerated in recent months by the Covid-19 pandemic and the criminal tragedy of the 4 August explosion. The hyperinflation of more than 75 per cent expected in 2020 has pushed a large part of the Lebanese below the poverty line, estimated at more than 50 per cent. At the same time, the US firm Alvarez & Marsal, in charge of the forensic accounting part of the audit of the accounts of the Bank of Lebanon (BDL), broke its contract with the Lebanese State at the end of November due to the BDL’s refusal to provide it with the documents required for its mission, on the pretext of banking secrecy. This demonstrates in particular the will of the institution, symbol and predominant actor in the neo-liberal economic policy of the country’s elites, not to reveal the corruption of political leaders involved in

multiple illicit financial affairs and corruptions.

The declarations and actions of Macron and the international monetary authorities remain along the same lines as the previous ones: to maintain in power the dominant neo-liberal confessional parties, responsible for the social misery of the working classes in Lebanon, calling on them to unite, once again, within a government of national unity capable of carrying out the “reforms” of the donors which will impoverish even more large sectors of society.

9 December 2020

Shame on Macron rolling out the red carpet for dictator Sissi

NPA statement

A few days before the tenth anniversary of the Arab uprisings of winter 2010-2011, Emmanuel Macron has chosen to welcome with great pomp the Egyptian dictator Abdel Fattah al-Sissi, one of the most brutal actors of the counter-revolution that has fallen on the aspirations of the peoples of the Middle East and North Africa region. Sissi is a symbol of the violent repression of all political and social opposition and the systematic confinement of critics of his regime and human rights activists, such as Ramy Shaath, activist of the 2011 uprising and co-founder of the BDS movement in Egypt, who has been imprisoned for more than a year and a half.

But what do thousands of dead and tens of thousands of political prisoners represent when it comes to talking about big money and strategic alliances? Macron said on Monday, 7 December: “I will not condition our cooperation in defence and economic matters on disagreements [over human rights].” This is worth saying, although we are not surprised, because Macron is following in the footsteps of his predecessor François Hollande, who can boast of having made France the leading arms supplier to Egypt in 2013 - the year of Sissi's coup d'état.

Once again, it is the “fight against terrorism” that is being brandished by the French government to justify the unjustifiable. Macron said: “It is more effective to have a policy of demanding dialogue than a policy of boycott that would reduce the effectiveness of one of our partners in the fight against terrorism and for regional stability.” A “demanding dialogue” that does not seem to worry Sissi, who is quite comfortable with seeing the red carpet rolled out and obtaining new guarantees of French military support.

Once again, we can see to what extent the enemies of the peoples recognise each other: the lamentable staging of Macron the authoritarian's cronyism with Sissi the dictator is an opportunity for us to demand the release of all political prisoners in Egypt, the immediate halt to all arms sales to the Sissi regime, and to reaffirm our total solidarity with the Egyptian people. As such, the NPA will be present at the rally organised this Tuesday at 6 pm at Edouard-Herriot Square, near the National Assembly, on the initiative of many NGOs and human rights associations.

Montreuil, 8 December 2020

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