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France

Political instability in France: act before it's too late

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The global crisis of capitalism and its ecological dimension are provoking a major political crisis. In the countries of the Global North, and in France in particular, the bourgeoisie is seeking to settle accounts with the post-World War II social compromise, violently and rapidly.

The class struggle today resembles a blend of the late nineteenth century and the 1930s more than anything we've experienced in the last five decades. We must build a united front, both to rebuild the class for itself and to combat the rise of the far right—that is, to combine elements of clarification with a unifying political approach. The historical and theoretical achievements of our political current constitute tools that we must now collectively appropriate, update, and implement.

While global economic growth is halved compared to the 1960s, it is divided by six in Europe and France is expected to barely reach 0.8 per cent this year, according to the latest forecast from INSEE. [1]

Economic crisis, debt and massive transfer of public money to the private sector

The mechanisms previously used by European capitalism to maintain its profit rates are ineffective today, whether one considers increasing labour productivity or expanding its imperialist sphere. Other mechanisms are therefore being implemented, with less efficiency and a high social cost for the working classes.

To maintain the profitability of capital, the French state has carried out a massive transfer of public money in recent years. According to a report by ATTAC France covering the period 2018-2023, reductions in levies (social security contributions, taxes, etc.) represent more than 300 billion euros cumulatively, contributing nearly 35 per cent to the increase in France's debt.

Regarding public aid paid to businesses, a Senate inquiry commission estimates it at over 211 billion euros for the year 2023 alone. The public finances union of the Solidaires federation estimates illegal tax avoidance at over 80 billion euros

These estimates completely contradict government narratives that systematically attribute this debt to soaring spending and the supposedly overly generous "French social model." This disagreement over interpretation masks a major ideological issue and lies at the heart of the social conflicts surrounding social security in recent years.

Meanwhile, this increase in debt and the government's difficulties in balancing a budget have led to the downgrading of France's rating by various rating agencies, a downgrade which in turn fuels economic instability and the increase in the cost of debt.

Crisis of French imperialism, industrial crisis and the race to war

In the context of the global crisis, access to energy and mineral resources is a major issue. Whether in the Middle East, Asia, or Africa, the desire for control and the reorganization of imperialist powers are exacerbating tensions, with terrible consequences for the people, whether in Gaza, Ukraine, Sudan, or the DRC, to name just a few. China's growing industrial and technological influence is pushing both the United States and the countries of Western Europe to their limits.

In France, despite the financial support businesses are receiving, they are struggling to stay afloat. Today, probably more than half a million jobs are disappearing, while the country already has over five million unemployed. The few job "rescues" achieved through reallocation to the military sector, such as at the Brittany Foundries or Renault, will not be able to stem the tide, unless there is a much more significant shift towards a real war economy.

Faced with the crisis in mass industrial production and fierce international competition, the military and defence industry is one of the solutions currently being considered by imperialist powers. The trend towards rearmament was already underway in France, as the defence budget had increased from 32 billion to 50 billion (excluding pensions) between 2017 and 2025. Macron's target of 3.5 per cent of GDP allocated to military spending would represent a very significant increase of around 40 billion euros.

Transfer of the global crisis into the political sphere

Contrary to what we are being led to believe, it is not the political crisis that is destabilizing the French economy. On the contrary, this political crisis is the direct consequence of the crisis of capitalism, of the fierce desire of the wealthy to seize ever more of the wealth produced, and of the contradictions at work within the bourgeoisie regarding the means of achieving this.

France is one of the European countries where the working classes remain significantly structured. The defeats accumulated over the last three decades weigh heavily, but the fact that they were conceded only after hard-fought battles has maintained a level of awareness and combativeness that has considerably weakened the political power of the state.

As Macron nears the end of his second term, he has exhausted the image of a centrist manager. This is primarily because the policies implemented over the past decade have clearly revealed his political leanings, and secondly because each political party hopes to gain an advantage by distancing itself from his record.

A real risk of the far right coming to power

The rise of racist, particularly Islamophobic, and security-focused rhetoric since the 2001 attacks paved the way for the National Front, now known as the National Rally. While the right wing is obviously on the offensive regarding these issues, a segment of the left also contributes to the spread of these repugnant ideas through security-driven and/or protectionist/nationalist rhetoric. The decline of anti-racist and internationalist movements, linked to the disillusionment of a significant portion of the racialized population with the institutional left, is a serious problem.

Capitalizing on the despair generated by the social situation, the National Rally achieves significant scores among the working classes. But in recent elections, it is primarily a broadening of its social base among the middle classes that has been observed. At the same time, a number of top executives no longer hide their sympathy for far-right

ideas, and these executives are gradually extending their influence in the media through various acquisitions.

From the perspective of the growing influence of the far right, we are in a context that is reminiscent of the 1930s.

A fractured left

On the other side of the political spectrum, the revolutionary far left is extremely fragmented and, to a large extent, inward-looking. Being part of the New Popular Front (NFP) during the June 2024 legislative elections allowed the NPA-L'Anticapitaliste to disseminate a radical message on a broad scale, while other far-left organizations were rendered completely invisible due to their incomprehensible stance regarding the threat of the far right coming to power.

As for the larger forces, the unity of the NFP did not last, and the institutional left finds itself once again fractured between a weakened social-liberal pole—embodied primarily by the Socialist Party (PS), which is willing to make significant compromises to maintain its institutional positions—and La France Insoumise (LFI), which appears as a very radical force in a context of declining social consciousness. It is LFI that today overwhelmingly channels the aspirations of the most politically aware segments of the working class. However, its actual grassroots activism remains weak in proportion to its electoral scores, and institutional illusions are very strong among its activists and supporters. Moreover, the lack of democratic structure is a significant obstacle to the expansion of this force. LFI is currently the only political force capable of initiating mass mobilizations, but its approach, by maintaining its absolute hegemony, prevents their development and hinders grassroots unity and the possibilities for self-organization.

Massive and regular social battles , but ultimately defeated

After the compromise of the so-called Trente Glorieuses [2]—a period that was ultimately quite short in history—the oil shock and the structural crisis quickly led the bourgeoisie to develop a strategy to regain the offensive. The 1980s and 90s saw the dismantling of large concentrations of workers and the development of new management methods that individualized employees. Attacks multiplied to reduce the "cost of labour": wage cuts, attacks on socialized wages, lay-offs, increased workloads, etc.

From 1995 to 2023, successive governments have consistently sought to destroy our social protection system in order to regain control of vast amounts of socialized money that are slipping through their fingers, but also to throw millions of people into the arena of the working world who should have been receiving unemployment, sickness, or retirement insurance.

Millions of workers took to the streets to defend our pension system, but apart from the partial victory of 1995, all subsequent battles ended in defeat. The weakness of the strikes, particularly in the private sector, and the difficulty in initiating rolling strikes in significant sectors, weighed heavily on the outcome. The strategies of the trade unions did not help, but they also reflected the decline in class consciousness and organization, and a lack of confidence in our own strength due to a lack of experience in achieving victories.

Militancy and radicalism exist, as seen with the Yellow Vest (GJ) movement in 2019 and also in many sectors of the labour movement, as well as in youth, working-class, feminist, and environmental mobilizations, which are increasingly forging links with the traditional labour movement. But in all cases, the self-organization of these

mobilizations has not been enough to make up for decades of setbacks. On a positive note, distrust of trade unions is generally declining, thanks both to the experiences of mobilization and to the unity they have achieved in recent times.

This aspiration for unity remains extremely strong, both in the trade union and political spheres. It is based on the understanding of the necessity of unity within our social camp in order to win, and is all the stronger because the level of awareness and militancy does not encourage the less combative organizations to move beyond strategies of compromise.

A strategy to rebuild class consciousness

Faced with the wait-and-see attitude of workers and the timid strategies of inter-union groupings, the temptation is strong to rely on the most radicalized sectors to stage demonstrations. However, history showed repeatedly throughout the twentieth century that there are no shortcuts and that only the building of mass struggles capable of paralyzing the economy allows for significant progress. Whether in 1995 (mobilization for Social Security and pensions), 2003 (alignment of public and private sector pensions), 2010 (again, the fight for pensions), or during the youth mobilization against the CPE in 2006, genuine frameworks for self-organization existed at various levels—frameworks that were unfortunately much weaker in the mobilizations that followed. The emergence of social media and digital communication methods contributes to this disaffection with traditional workplace discussion and decision-making frameworks. While they allow for much faster and wider dissemination of information, they also foster an individualized, debate-free relationship with that information and make attending meetings optional for accessing it.

The decline of self-organization structures makes it difficult to share experiences and therefore to identify concerns and demands that strengthen mobilizations and unify sectors. Solidarity, determination, and collective anger are reinforced by the enthusiasm of shared moments in general assemblies, around picket lines, even more so than in marches. Extending a strike depends primarily on the energy of a general assembly, and without it, it is very difficult to prolong a 24-hour strike.

Self-organization frameworks also allow for progress, harmonization, and alignment with the level of awareness, even during periods of rapid change. These periods have crystallized in recent years around political or democratic issues such as the 2019 women's pension reform, the use of Article 49.3 to pass the pension reform by decree in 2023, and the violent state repression during the Yellow Vest movement. Self-organization frameworks enable a shared understanding of the capital/labour conflict on a broad scale, allowing it to be translated into concrete demands and also clarifying the confrontation with the state apparatus that defends the dominant classes.

Therefore, bringing sectoral demands to the fore and building self-organization are essential tasks for revolutionary activists .

For our class to regain confidence in its strength, it is essential that it once again experience victorious struggles, even partial or local ones, but significant on a mass scale. From this perspective, the retreat of the Lecornu government, forced to postpone the implementation of the pension reform, should be an encouragement to press our advantage against an illegitimate and greatly weakened government.

Building the social and political front

The mobilization this autumn began immediately with very broad and political slogans: rejection of the budget presented by Prime Minister François Bayrou and the omnipresent chant of "Macron out!" The government's resignation and the institutional crisis that lasted several weeks partially disarmed the movement, due to a lack of concrete demands in the absence of a concrete budget and an enemy to oppose. The challenge now is to engage with the movement where it stands, that is, not solely focused on a specific demand like "withdrawal of the reform," but on a broader understanding of the issues and a direct confrontation with the current government. Indeed, behind the demand to withdraw Bayrou's budget lay not only the refusal to work two extra days, but also the defence of public services and social security, as well as opposition to the increase in the defence budget.

This maturity of the movement should not, however, make us forget the difficulties, in a context of a severely deteriorated relationship of forces. First and foremost, we must absolutely not underestimate the threat of the far right coming to power. We must understand how this weighs on the dynamics of the various organizations: the ongoing realignments on the right, the fear among some on the left of a shift towards the far right should the National Assembly be dissolved, the reluctance of the inter-union alliance to exacerbate the crisis...

This compels us to be extremely clear about our political stance. The unity of our social camp against the far right is a crucial issue for the vast majority of the population, and particularly for people of colour, women, LGBTQ+ individuals, activists, and others. We must lead the fight for this unity as the most radical wing, which we did by participating in the June 2024 legislative elections. The current divisions within the left and the electoral calculations of various parties raise concerns that, should the National Assembly be dissolved, the far right will this time find no obstacle to its rise to power. The rejection of the government's motion of no confidence has postponed this deadline, but it is urgent that we focus our efforts on this battle.

Maintaining a revolutionary perspective in a difficult context

Beyond these immediate challenges, as a revolutionary organization, we are reflecting on the forms that workers' contestation of the established power could take, and what political and organizational crystallizations could allow our class to make significant progress. Indeed, these efforts are rapidly being pushed and pulled between, on the one hand, a rejection of all organizations and a contestation of power within the framework of the system, and on the other, a strong subservience to union leadership or reformist political apparatuses. This is why we advocate a workers' government, a government of rupture that implements the demands of the social movement, formulating the foundations of its programme based on the reality of the current movement. The objective is to bridge the gap between mobilizations and anger against the system and the need to formulate a political perspective, which the masses essentially concretise from an institutional point of view. This is also why it is crucial to link the slogan of a government of rupture with radical, even anti-capitalist, demands on wages, the requisitioning of banks, the sliding scale of working hours, the opening of borders, etc.

In the context of a mass mobilization that would genuinely challenge the governing parties, presidentialism and the functioning of parliamentary assemblies, we must at the same time popularize the slogan of a constituent assembly, rejecting the Fifth Republic and questioning all the foundations of society, while being concerned that this slogan does not serve to canalise the upsurge of the masses into the institutional field and that it finds an echo in the mobilized circles, that it strengthens the political dimension of self-organization.

In any case, the reconstruction of a comprehensive, eco-socialist political project is on the agenda, something worth fighting for, something that breaks with defeatism and allows our class to dream again of better days and to draw strength from that to fight!

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[1] INSEE is the French national statistical institute.

[2] the term “Trente Glorieuses” is commonly used in France to describe the post-1945 expansive wave of the economy and the social gains that characterised it.