

FRANCE

After Losing the People, Macron Loses His Mind! Will He Lose His Head?

by Karel Vereycken, Vice-President of *Solidarité & Progrès*, Paris

March 24—Over the last weeks and months, millions of French citizens have participated in thousands of strikes, demonstrations, candlelight vigils, petitions and debates against highly unpopular pension reform legislation. With no guarantee of passage by the lower house of the French Parliament (*Assemblée Nationale*), President Emmanuel Macron resorted to using special constitutional powers (Article 49.3) to ram the bill through without a vote. In a last-ditch effort to block the bill, opponents within the *Assemblée Nationale* held two no-confidence votes, one falling short by only nine votes, which would have brought down the Macron government.

On Wednesday, March 22, isolated, President Macron said he was ready to “shoulder unpopularity.” He reiterated the point that this pension reform was “necessary”: “As I speak to you, do you think it makes me happy [to do it]? No.” He said he didn’t seek to be re-elected and that “between the short-term polls and the general interest of the country, I choose the general interest of the country.” No government reshuffling or popular referendum will be held to take into account the demands of the people. The new law has to be applied as soon as this autumn, he said. A procedure to prevent the law from being applied has been filed at the Constitutional Council, but the review process could take many weeks, and a popular referendum against the law, unless initiated by the



UN/Gonçalo Borges Dias

Emmanuel Macron, President of France.

President, would take months to be organized.

The Mob or the People?

“The mob, whoever it is, has no legitimacy in front of the people whose sovereignty expresses itself through their representatives,” Macron reportedly told his close circle. Denying the very existence and claims of millions of ordinary people who

are not mobsters, “the riot doesn’t prevail over the representatives of the people,” he added.

Fronting as a victim and potential target of right-wing populists capable of storming government buildings, Macron said, “When the United States has experi-



Solidarité et Progrès

In Nantes, and in all of France, citizens are in the streets demonstrating against the decimation of their living conditions. March 22, 2023.

enced what it experienced on Capitol Hill, when Brazil experienced what it experienced, when you have had extreme violence in Germany, in the Netherlands or in the past with us, I say to you very clearly: we have to

say ‘We respect, we listen, we try to move forward for the country ... but we can’t accept either factionalists or factions’.”

As Macron did with the Yellow Vests uprising in 2018-2019, it is by qualifying *all* demonstrators as irresponsible “mobsters,” that he joins a long list of “tragic” characters including the French royalty whose lives ended at the guillotine. Youth in Paris and Toulouse are already singing, “Macron, we can do it again! Louis XVI was beheaded!”

Macron’s Error?

With the French economy sinking, Macron, a former investment banker, is convinced he has to “send a message,” not to the people for whom he pretends to care, but to the financial markets and the rating agencies which *de facto* control France’s capacity to borrow money to pay its debt. Like Shylock in Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice*, the markets claim their pound of flesh, in this case the sacrifice called “pension reform.”

French citizens, regardless of their education, remain French citizens. And when their president refuses to tell them the truth and, even worse, accuses them of being mobsters while they are simply refusing the decimation of their living conditions, he loses the mandate of heaven.

Former presidential candidate Marine Le Pen, leader of the largest opposition group in the Parliament, said she will “not participate in extinguishing the fire,” which was “ignited” by the government “putting into place all the conditions for a social explosion.”

In Paris, with the waste incinerators blocked by the unions, some 8,000 tons of household garbage has not been collected and is piled up in the streets. Most oil refineries are blocked. At this hour of writing, at least 12% of gas stations nationally, and in some regions up to 50%, are lacking one or more types of fuel. On Thursday, March 23, some 600 new civil actions, legal and illegal, will take place, hitting especially education, transportation and energy. Roads are blocked, electric-

ity cut, and big companies face occupations and strikes.

Mob of Bankers

An article in *Le Monde* sheds some light on Macron’s “flight forward” into what Jacques Cheminade, President of *Solidarité & Progrès*, already in 2007 called “financial fascism.” To justify the decision to bypass a vote of the *Assemblée Nationale*, President Macron told the Council of Ministers on Thursday, March 16: “I consider that as it stands, the financial, economic risks are too great.”

“His message,” wrote *Le Monde*, “was that giving



Solidarité et Progrès

In the midst of rising social anger, and with protesters comparing President Macron to the beheaded King Louis XVI, the expected visit by British monarch Charles III was cancelled as too risky. Nantes, March 22, 2023.

up on this bill would put the country’s ability to borrow on the financial markets at risk. The argument was already put forward in the first Council of Ministers of 2023, when the government formally launched the pension reform. The President had then pointed out to his ministers that France was now borrowing ‘above 3%, which had not happened for years,’ seeing this as a new sign of what he calls the ‘end of abundance’.”

“In recent months,” continues *Le Monde*, “the specter of bankruptcy has been brandished continuously by the government, during debates in Parliament, in TV studios and in negotiations with the opposition. All winter, Public Accounts Minister Gabriel Attal repeated: ‘It’s reform or bankruptcy!’ He claimed that not carrying out the reform would lead

to ‘€500 billion in additional debt’.”

Macron is harvesting largely the consequences of the Anglo-American war policies, dictated by the “mob” of bankers to which he submitted, especially the explosion of energy prices following the sanctions against Russia. Soaring gas, oil and raw materials prices led the French trade deficit to almost double in 2022 to €164 billion, according to figures published on February 7 by the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, the widest deficit since World War II.

At this point, France is about to officially pass the €3 trillion debt threshold. And the rates that have been rising for the past year have already increased the debt burden by €13 billion in 2022. “We were dealing with an exceptional situation in 2022,” says Olivier Becht, the French Minister for Foreign Trade. “We had to import electricity to compensate for the fact that many [French] nuclear reactors were undergoing maintenance,” he said. “And the impact [of the war] in Ukraine led to skyrocketing gas and oil prices, which [at times] doubled or even tripled.”

“In recent weeks,” writes *Le Monde*, “while monitoring the state of public opinion, Macron has been discreetly consulting market economists, just to keep an eye on the investors capable of tipping a country into chaos even faster than the demonstrators. With the bankruptcies of Silicon Valley Bank and Credit Suisse, Macron hopes that the fear of bankruptcy will help him convince the French nation. Violent riots, some might hope, could help Macron appear as the man of ‘law and order’.”

King Charles III’s Visit Canceled

In the midst of the rising social anger, and with protesters comparing Macron to the beheaded King Louis XVI, the expected visit of British monarch Charles III to France became a risky event, which opposition politicians demanded be canceled and which is “in the line of sight” of trade unionists angry against the stinking rich billionaires destroying the nation. Not really the moment to “stick out your neck” in France, if you are a British stinking rich King. On March 24, King Charles III announced he had postponed his planned trip to France in light of the mass demonstrations filling the streets across the nation. It has been reported that Macron, as the situation escalated, requested the postponement.

Many of those who had been protesting the visit of King Charles are opportunists, but it does reveal

the spirit of the moment. The Green deputy Sandrine Rousseau called Wednesday, March 22 for the cancellation of the king’s visit, which was scheduled for Sunday, because, according to her, the priority of the President of the Republic, Emmanuel Macron, must be to “discuss with the society that is rising up” against the pension reform. “Unbelievable! We will have Emmanuel Macron, the republican monarch, who will receive Charles III, who will go down the Champs-Élysées, who will go to dinner at Versailles, while the people in the street are demonstrating,” she exclaimed on BFM-TV and Radio Monte-Carlo (RMC).

As for the unions, “we will continue to mobilize [against the reform] and this visit will be in our sight lines,” warned Mathieu Oby (CGT) and Yvan Fort (FO) in the daily *Sud-Ouest* this week. “It is almost certain that the king will not be able to take the tramway” in Bordeaux as he had planned, anticipated Pascal Mesgueni, delegate at the TBM transport company.

While the Paris police prefect, Laurent Nunez, said he was “very serene” on BFM-TV, Buckingham Palace was nevertheless keeping an anxious eye on the demonstrations, reported the *Daily Mail*, which mentioned the additional logistical precautions being planned.

Emmanuel Macron “is certainly more comfortable with monarchs than with the elected representatives of the people, to whom he denies the right to vote on his pension reform,” said Ian Brossat, spokesman for the PCF (French Communist Party), after the forced adoption of this change in the pension law via Article 49.3 of the Constitution. Socialist Party Senator Remi Cardon has for his part observed that “there will be no crowd bath” of Charles III and Emmanuel Macron. On the far left, the spokesman of the NPA (New Anti-Capitalist Party), Olivier Besancenot, on *France Info* radio regarding the visit of Charles III, said joyfully, “We will welcome him with a good old general strike!”

The Way Out

As Jacques Cheminade continues to emphasize, there is no magical “French” solution to the crisis in France. France should, as De Gaulle did in 1965, immediately break with the war party by putting itself “on leave” from NATO and participate in the efforts of the “Peace Club” proposed by Brazilian President Lula da Silva, who, together with the efforts of China and the Vatican, is working overtime to stop the war in Ukraine and create a “new architecture of mutual development and security” capable of bringing development to all.