

Benalla affair destabilises Macron government in France

By Francis Dubois
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For the first time since becoming president a year ago, Emmanuel Macron is confronting a media and parliamentary campaign, triggered by the “Benalla affair,” which is destabilising both him and his ruling party, The Republic on the March (LRM). Last week, the pressure on Macron, who has refused to speak publicly on the affair, reached a new peak.

The affair began on July 19, when *Le Monde* identified a close collaborator of the president, Alexandre Benalla, captured on video violently beating demonstrators on May Day in Paris. Violations of normal police procedure have since been tied directly to Macron's personal security staff and to high-level officials of the Parisian police, notably those tasked with “managing” political demonstrations.

At present, Macron faces a counteroffensive from sections of the police apparatus that have publicly reproached him for improper interference in their operations. The prefect of Paris, speaking before a parliamentary commission established on Friday, denounced the “unacceptable, condemnable outgrowth of unhealthy cronyism.”

Benalla, Fabien Crase—the head of security for LRM—and three top police officials connected to them have been placed under investigation. Benalla was sacked by the Elysée presidential palace on charges of “public violence” the day after *Le Monde's* revelations. Crase was sacked for the same charge.

Macron on Tuesday refused to respond publicly after deputies and leaders of political parties requested that he testify before a parliamentary commission of inquiry. Some raised the possibility of impeaching the president, which has never taken place before in the history of the French Republic.

The police forces and the parliamentary opposition parties leading the offensive against Macron are no less

reactionary than Macron himself. They defend social austerity and militarism as much as he does. The Assembly and the Senate have sought to exploit the scandal to block Macron's anti-democratic constitutional reform aimed at expanding presidential powers. Their criticisms of the Elysée, however, are aimed above all at defending the same police forces exposed on video engaged in arbitrary violence against the population.

The depositions of Interior Minister Gérard Collomb, the prefect of police and the director of public security were damaging to the presidency. The first two refused to take any responsibility and pointed the finger at Macron, and the third contradicted the declarations from the Elysée that the police had authorised Benalla to attend the demonstration.

One of the most persistent charges against Macron is that the Elysée is building a parallel police force—essentially an illegal militia—independent of the police apparatus that is normally responsible for the president's security. Another is that, despite knowing about the events in question starting on May 2, neither the interior ministry nor the presidency alerted the public prosecutor, though they are required to do so by law.

Compromising revelations continue to emerge around Benalla. After having been “sanctioned” on May 2, according to the Elysée, he continued his functions as the head of presidential security and was afterward reportedly provided with exorbitant privileges for his role as a “project leader,” including a monthly salary approaching 10,000 euros.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the head of Unsubmissive France (LFI), the pseudo-left ally of Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain, is playing a leading role in this crisis, exploiting his close ties with the police,

intelligence agencies and the military.

The “commission of inquiry” of the Assembly has been convoked largely upon Mélenchon’s initiative, to keep the crisis engulfing the French presidency from precipitating a movement of the working class against Macron. Mélenchon proposed a motion of censure against the government, which was taken up on Monday by The Republicans (LR), the official right-wing party.

Last week, Mélenchon stated that he had above all sought to “ensure that an extremely grave crisis be resolved through a controlled institutional framework. I have always sought to find a resolution in the framework of a parliamentary democracy. This has been prevented by the actions of the president of the Republic.” He underlined that “what is important is an institutional resolution, that politics continue to unfold in an orderly way.”

As for the parliamentary commission of inquiry, the so-called opposition to Macron has functioned since July 19 as one party engaged in one political operation.

This united front, which includes, in addition to the governmental LRM, the neo-fascistic National Front (now renamed the National Rally), Mélenchon's LFI, the LR, as well as the Socialist Party (PS) and the French Communist Party (PCF). The central axis of this operation is an unflagging defence of the police and its violent attacks on protesting workers and students. The more the Benalla affair exposes the illegal violence of the state apparatus targeting the population, the more aggressively the ruling elite rallies around the police forces.

The violence in Paris on May Day began when the police attacked a contingent of 1,200 masked members of the Black Bloc—which is known to be heavily infiltrated by police agents—who had inserted themselves into the demonstration. Large sections of the media and the political establishment denounced the protesters as “hooligans.”

The government and the unions exploited the confrontations to demand an end to the strikes and demonstrations. Macron let it be known that he could order the dissolution of the political organizations that were involved. On Twitter, he declared: “I condemn with absolute firmness the violence which took place and which diverted the protests of May 1. Everything will be done to ensure that the instigators are identified

and held to account for their actions.”

One of the underlying criticisms against Macron in official circles has been that by failing to intervene after Benalla was identified on social media after May 1, he discredited the official police account of the May Day clashes.

In the factional conflict now underway within the ruling elite, all sides are deeply hostile to the working class and desperate to block the emergence a renewal of workers’ struggles. The allegations of corruption and impropriety being hurled back and forth at the highest echelons of the state are aimed at stoking a right-wing pro-police climate and settling tactical differences with Macron and the Elysée via the methods of a palace coup.

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