



Written by [James Murphy](#) on March 17, 2023

Riots Erupt in France Over Macron's Decision to Raise Retirement Age

French President Emmanuel Macron has his hands full.

Since January, many unions have been on strike over reforms that Macron claims are necessary to shore up the nation's struggling pension system. On Thursday, Macron ordered Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne to bypass the National Assembly and push through new legislation that would raise the retirement age in France from 62 to 64 for most French workers.

France's Senate adopted the reforms earlier in the day in a 193-114 vote. Macron then utilized a barely used codicil, known as Article [49.3](#), to, essentially, declare the vote passed in the National Assembly, where passage was far less assured. 49.3 is often described as a "nuclear legislative weapon."

"Today, uncertainty looms," Borne declared over loud booning, before adding, "We cannot gamble on the future of our pensions. That reform is necessary."

Macron's seemingly unilateral decision to change the pension system in France has ignited protests — sometimes violent [protests](#) — for weeks. Trash collectors have been on strike for weeks, fuel deliveries are behind, and travel is snarled all over the country. Yesterday's skirting of parliament by Macron sparked the largest night of protests yet.

The National Assembly's only option to stop the legislation at this point is a no-confidence vote, which most expect early next week. If Macron survives the vote, he will stay in office and the new pension law will be considered passed. Should he lose the vote, Macron would have to step down as president.

Both extremes in the National Assembly have promised to protest Macron's measure with a no-confidence vote.

Bitter Macron rival Marine Le Pen of the National Rally party has signaled that she will likely call for a no-confidence vote.

"The use of 49.3 for the 11th time and on a text so fundamental and massively rejected by the French, betrays the headlong rush of an executive who no longer hears and no longer listens to the people. Censorship must be the answer to this impeded democracy," Le Pen [tweeted](#).

Communist lawmaker Fabien Rousse claimed that a no-confidence vote from the far left was ready to go.



AP Images
Protest in Paris



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“The mobilization will continue,” Roussel said. “This reform must be suspended.”

Striking union members were also enraged by Macron’s circumvention of the Assembly.

“By resorting to [Article] 49.3 the government demonstrates that it does not have a majority to approve the two-year postponement of the legal retirement age,” said Laurent Berger, secretary of the French Democratic Confederation of Labour (CDFL). “The political compromise failed. Workers must be listened to when it is their work being acted upon.”

Although the pension reform is widely unpopular with the citizenry, Macron is expected to survive a no-confidence vote.

While presenting Macron’s plan at yesterday’s meeting of the National Assembly, Borne was loudly booed and taunted while she touted the bill. Borne noted that the expected no-confidence vote would be the Assembly’s chance to vote the reforms down.

“There will actually be a proper vote and therefore the parliamentary democracy will have the last say,” Borne said.

On television later, Borne claimed that the boos in the assembly were only because some elements of the assembly wanted chaos.

“Certain [opposition lawmakers] want chaos, at the Assembly and in the streets,” Borne said.

In addition to the booing, there were chants in the assembly, and in the streets, for Macron to resign.

It’s an issue the French should have seen coming. For decades now, birth rates in France (along with many other Western countries) have been declining, leaving far fewer workers to pay for a generous pension system for people who are living longer than ever.

It’s been a lingering problem as well, with Macron attempting to address the issue during his first term, which resulted in wide-scale strikes. The first effort was placed on the back burner due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

As unpopular as it was the first time, this time it was doubly so as Macron included raising the retirement age. Generous retirement plans are always popular with the people. Taking them away or telling the people they must wait longer in order to claim those benefits is a tough sell.



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