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‘Macron resign!’ French protests intensify over attempt to force retirement age hike

written by Jessica Corbett
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Opponents of raising the French retirement age by two years chant at Place de la Concorde in Paris, France, on March 17, 2023.

March 17 — Protests in Paris and across France have ramped up since President Emmanuel Macron’s government on Thursday [used](#) a controversial constitutional measure to force through a pension reform plan without a National Assembly vote.

Fears that the Senate-approved measure — which would raise the retirement age from 62 to 64 — did not have enough support to pass the lower house of Parliament led to a Council of Ministers meeting, during which Macron reportedly [said](#) that “my political interest would have been to submit to a vote... But I consider that the

financial, economic risks are too great at this stage.”

After the meeting, French Prime Minister Élisabeth Borne [announced](#) the decision to go with the “nuclear option,” invoking Article 49.3 of the French Constitution—a calculated risk considering the potential for a resulting motion of no-confidence.

Members of Parliament opposed to the overhaul filed a pair of no-confidence motions on Friday, and votes are expected on Monday. Although unlikely, given the current makeup of the legislature, passing such a motion would not only reject the looming pension law but also [oust](#) Macron’s prime minister and Cabinet, and [likely](#) lead to early elections in France.

As *Deutsche Welle* [reported](#):

“The vote on this motion will allow us to get out on top of a deep political crisis,” said the head of the so-called LIOT group Bertrand Pancher, whose motion was co-signed by members of the broad left-wing NUPES coalition.

The far-right National Rally (RN) filed a second motion, but that was expected to get less backing. RN lawmaker Laure Lavalette however, said her party would vote for “all” no-confidence motions filed. “What counts is scuppering this unfair reform bill,” she said.

Leaders of the Les Republicains (LR) are not sponsoring any such motions. *Reuters* [explained](#) that individuals in the conservative party “have said they could break ranks, but the no-confidence bill would require all of the other opposition lawmakers and half of LR’s 61 lawmakers to go through, which is a tall order.”

Still, Green MP Julien Bayou [said](#), “it’s maybe the first time that a motion of no-confidence may overthrow the government.”

Meanwhile, protests against the pension proposal—which have been happening

throughout the year—continue in the streets, with some drawing comparisons to France’s “Yellow Vests” movement [sparked](#) by fuel prices and economic conditions in 2018.

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Après le déclenchement du 49.3 décidé par Emmanuel Macron sur la réforme des retraites, le gouvernement doit composer avec une crise politique: les oppositions vont déposer des motions de censure et de nouvelles manifestations sont annoncées [#AFP](#) 1/5 pic.twitter.com/LvQQLwgRRB

— Agence France-Presse (@afpfr) [March 17, 2023](#)

Not long after Borne’s Article 49.3 announcement on Thursday, “protesters began to converge on the sprawling Place de la Concorde in central Paris, a mere bridge away from the heavily guarded National Assembly,” [according to France 24](#).

As the news outlet detailed:

There were the usual suspects, like leftist firebrand Jean-Luc Mélenchon, thundering against a reform he said had “no legitimacy—neither in Parliament, nor in the street.” Unionists were also out in strength, hailing a moral victory even as they denounced [Macron](#)’s “violation of democracy.”

Many more were ordinary protesters who had flocked to the Concorde after class or work. One brandished a giant fork made of cardboard as the crowd chanted “Macron démission” (Macron resign). Another spray-painted an ominous message on a metal barrier—“The shadow of the guillotine is nearing”—in the exact spot where Louis XVI was executed 230 years ago.

Police [used](#) tear gas to disperse the Concorde crowd. Interior Minister [Gérald](#)

[Darmanin](#) told *RTL* radio 310 people were arrested nationwide—258 of them in Paris. He said, “The opposition is legitimate, the protests are legitimate, but wreaking havoc is not.”

Anna Neiva Cardante is a 23-year-old student whose parents, a bricklayer and a cleaner, “are among those who stand to lose most.”

“A vote in the National Assembly was the government’s only chance of securing a measure of legitimacy for its reform,” Neiva Cardante told *France 24* as police cleared the crowd Thursday. “Now it has a full-blown crisis on its hands.”

“This reform is outrageous,” she added, “punishing women and the working class, and denying the hardship of those who have the toughest jobs.”

Across the French capital early Friday, “traffic, garbage collection, and university campuses in the city were disrupted, as unions threatened open-ended strikes,” *DW* noted. “Elsewhere in the country, striking sanitation workers blocked a waste collection plant that is home to Europe’s largest incinerator to underline their determination.”

A Paris, capitale du tourisme mondial, on prend en photo les murs de poubelles
[#AFP](#)

➔ <https://t.co/m4vtUB0omB> pic.twitter.com/jhxcxzmkYx

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“Article 49.3 constitutes a triple defeat for the executive: popular, political, and moral,” [declared](#) Laurent Escure, secretary general of the labor union UNSA. “It opens up a new stage for the protests.”

The French newspaper *Le Monde* [reported](#) that “the leaders of France’s eight main

labor unions called for 'local union rallies' on the weekend of March 18 and 19 and for a 'new big day of strikes and demonstrations' on Thursday, March 23."

Philippe Martinez of the CGT union [asserted](#) that "this forced passage with the use of Article 49.3 must be met with a response in line with this show of contempt toward the people."

Fellow CGT representative Régis Viecei vowed that "we are not going to stop," [telling](#) *The Associated Press* that flooding the streets and refusing to work is "the only way that we will get them to back down."

Source: [Common Dreams](#)

