

## [Transcript] The News Agents / Why is Paris burning?

This is a Global Player original podcast.

The French police have just arrived.

Big, big clash between protesters and them forced us to go around the corner.

And we're actually just getting sort of more and more cornered into a central bit of Paris because each street is now being cut off completely, either between protesters or the police, or both.

And actually there are just loads of civilians, let's put it that way, people who live in the area or have been out in the evening, who clearly are pretty trapped, not entirely sure where to go because in every single direction you look now, there is chaos, there is disorder, there are people who are looking for some serious trouble.

Paris is on fire tonight.

And seriously, that is no exaggeration.

There is virtually no street in central Paris that you can go down and not see either flame or the remains of flame, ember.

And that is because the French capital is being gripped by the worst protests, anti-government protests for years.

And all of this comes down to one man, one man's agenda, one man's legacy, President Emmanuel Macron, re-elected not even a year ago, but who has turned 70% of this country, of the French electorate, against him.

This episode is going to tell you why.

Because we've spent the whole day on the streets of Paris, following the protesters, the good and the bad, the full might of the French state out in force.

And through that day, we're going to tell you exactly why this matters and, more importantly, where this could be going, because this is bigger than Emmanuel Macron.

This is about the French Fifth Republic itself, and how, in the end, one reform could yet spiral and lead to the election of that thing which has been speculated about and thought about for year after year, presidential cycle after presidential cycle, the election of Marine Le Pen and the French far-right.

And with it, maybe, a very different Europe to come.

It's Lewis here. Welcome to The News Agents.

The News Agents

French President Emmanuel Macron's government is facing a no-confidence vote today over his decision to raise the country's retirement age from 62 to 64.

Why is Paris burning?

It is burning over something seemingly so innocuous, passed through almost without contention in country after country pension reform.

It has gripped France and French political life for weeks and months.

Why? Emmanuel Macron wants to increase the age at which a French citizen can receive a full state pension from 62 to 64.

He argues that with a rapidly aging population,

## [Transcript] The News Agents / Why is Paris burning?

the fund will eventually become insolvent.  
But this is a third rail of French politics,  
which has defeated several of his predecessors.  
Precisely why French workers continue to enjoy such generous pension provision  
as fellow European countries' pensionable ages have soared.  
Moreover, Macron has done it through section 49.3 of the French Constitution,  
effectively forcing it through as president without the approval  
of the Assemblée Nationale, the French parliament.  
And so here we are again, week after week of protest,  
some of which have turned violent, week after week of strikes.  
It's even led on Friday morning to the postponement  
of King Charles' first state visit to France due next Tuesday,  
a source of deep embarrassment for both the Elysees and Buckingham palaces.  
And even when the streets aren't full of strikers or protesters,  
they're full of a reminder of when they were.  
There is nothing quite like Paris in the springtime, so they say.  
But we're just walking along now the Rue de la Boétie.  
And as always with Paris, it's gorgeous.  
It does feel like spring.  
The buildings, the house moulins are everywhere,  
all the little restaurants and cafes that make this so many people's favourite city,  
but it's punctuated by something else.  
And it's more of a odour. It stinks. It completely stinks.  
Because as far as the eye can see, every five, ten metres or so,  
there is just massive mound after mound after mound of garbage, rubbish, trash,  
piled as high as the eye can see.  
And that is because for some time now, there have been no rubbish collections in this city  
because they are all on strike because of what Emmanuel Macron is proposing to do  
to their and everybody else's pensions.  
I'm Sophie Pedder. I'm the Paris Bureau Chief here for the Economist.  
It's just making life difficult every day.  
There have been sort of sporadic electricity cuts.  
Schools have been shut. It's kind of difficult to plan life and to live normal life.  
So not the easiest of times for Paris, but you know, living here is something,  
that is something you do get used to.  
I mean, I think the key to understanding why there's been so much hostility  
is the fact that he was re-elected at the presidential election,  
but then in June there was a parliamentary election,  
and at that vote he lost his majority.  
And so he has been governing with the minority government,  
and this from the very beginning made everything more complicated for him.  
It means because he decided not to try and stitch together a formal coalition,  
every single vote he has to get, he has to scramble around for,  
and his government has to work for.

## [Transcript] The News Agents / Why is Paris burning?

And that is why he's, in the end, had to force it through parliament with this kind of draconian constitutional provision, which is perfectly legal, but it's politically very difficult for him to do, and that's, I think, why people are so angry.

And this is the section 49.3.

From the outside, again, looking in, people might think that's very odd.

It's fundamentally a presidential system, but he wasn't able to get a majority for it, and he's been able to push it through anyway.

That has intensified the anger substantially, hasn't it?

It has, you're right, but it has, because it's seen as a sort of imperious measure, top-down, you know, heavy-handed, which corresponds to the way that France thinks that Macron runs the presidency. So that hasn't helped.

I mean, actually, if you look at the provision, it is something that De Gaulle wrote into the Constitution in 1958, when he founded the Fifth Republic, and it's been used 100 times by different governments, left-wing governments, right-wing governments. It's unusual to use it, but it's not an outrageous or scandalous thing to do. Not unconstitutional. It is constitutional.

It's certainly not unconstitutional, and it's been used in order to get things through that are considered important in the national interest, but where there's no majority in parliament to do it. But that has been considered as a sort of, you know, almost like a declaration of war by the French, that there was never a vote on it in parliament. Instead, the government had to go to a no-confidence vote. It very narrowly survived by just nine votes.

And there is a view out there among the opposition and among a lot of French people that it's an illegitimate piece of legislation.

Thank you.

I'm going to ask each of the parliamentarians to sign a letter of goodwill immediately.

This is contrary to our regulation.

And the floor is to Madame la Premier ministre.

It is that section 49.3,

Macron forcing the changes through without a parliamentary majority by presidential decree, which has pulled petrol on this debate.

## [Transcript] The News Agents / Why is Paris burning?

Those were the scenes of uproar  
in the French parliament a week ago.  
Both sides now accuse the other of denigrating  
even destroying democracy.  
Paris is covered with placards and pictures  
depicting Macron as Louis XIV, a Bourbon king, a despot.  
Meanwhile, Macron accuses some on the streets  
of trying to overturn his mandate,  
even comparing them to the January 6th insurrectionists.  
So, Mathieu, what made you want to come out today?  
We need more democracy.  
We need democracy,  
and all the students and other people are here to show to Macron  
what is bad, very bad.  
So, do you think French democracy is on the line?  
Yes, it's in danger.  
You think French democracy is in danger?  
Sure.  
But Macron says that this is the danger to French democracy, right?  
That this is undemocrat, or at least the violent protest.  
Maybe not this, but the violent protest is undemocrat.  
Maybe. We are dangerous, or not?  
We are violent? No.  
We only use our voice.  
We don't understand why the people are angry.  
Why the people walk.  
And this is for that, we fight for that.  
We need democracy, more democracy in the...  
We are the country of democracy,  
because the country of revolution,  
we need democracy, we need to fight for that  
and preserve that.  
So, we've just actually cut down the back street in the hope,  
because we're supposed to be going to meet someone to interview them,  
in the hope that, in the street parallel adjacent to it,  
we'll be able to get there a bit faster,  
but there is absolutely zero hope of that,  
because such is the number of people.  
I cannot stress how big this protest is.  
Such are the numbers that they're just spilling onto,  
well, it seems like, every adjacent street,  
there isn't even room for them on the main boulevard.  
So, even here, it just goes on and on and on.  
What you have to understand about these protests

## [Transcript] The News Agents / Why is Paris burning?

is that they are very different by day and by night.  
You'll have seen the pictures of by night,  
and we'll get to that.  
But by day, there is good humour, even joy.  
Protest, this sort of protest, is what France does.  
How it wins, how it retains, it's right.  
So, I am right in the thick of the protest, the march now.  
This march that just goes on and on and on.  
I mean, I've covered marches, covered protests.  
I've never seen so many people.  
I mean, this is the power of the street.  
And what is also remarkable is that there are...  
There is a real cross-section of people here,  
and there are loads and loads of young people here.  
The only people that you don't really see,  
for a whole host of reasons, are much older people.  
Obviously, they're retired, fine.  
They've already got their retirement.  
But that is a really important part of this story.  
Macron has basically created a dynamic  
where the entire working-age population of France,  
from young to old, are against it.  
Why are you out today? Why?  
We need to do this, because it's for our future,  
because if we don't do this, we will work until we die.  
Until we die.  
But Macron says it's just until 64.  
That's not until death, is it?  
Yeah, but if we let him do this,  
he will do again and again and again and again.  
What do you think of Macron?  
We can't say that on TV.  
Yes, you can. Tell us.  
Well, just give us the clean version.  
Macron is a man who will do what he wants, when he wants.  
We are in democracy in France,  
and he acts like he is the king here.  
He doesn't care about us.  
He doesn't care about us, and people in the street,  
he doesn't care.  
He says that this is about France's future.  
He wants to protect France.  
No, it's about his future.  
He will kill our parents,

## [Transcript] The News Agents / Why is Paris burning?

because our parents will work at 64, is that 64?  
And just imagine about our kids.  
It's for us, it's 64.  
How many it's going to be for them?  
My mom is 50.  
She has to work until 64.  
She will be old lady,  
and she can't do that all his life.  
Democracy.  
In France, we have to vote for elect someone  
who will represent us in all the world.  
And he just threat us like his slaves.  
That's it.  
He's treating you like your slave.  
Not slave, but we work all our life.  
But he doesn't see what we do on our work.  
Are you going to win?  
The streets will win, do you think?  
I think so, because we already do that in the past,  
like in May 68.  
We win this time, and we will win this time again.  
So just hop in a cab to go to the next interview.  
Just notice, flashed up on my phone,  
the shoulder wall airport has been blocked,  
blockaded by protesters.  
Fellow driving the taxi has a French rolling news channel on,  
and they are obviously covering it from across the country.  
Split screen, just showing how much these protests  
are engulfing this nation.  
Split screen, six ways showing, yes, protests all over Paris,  
but also in Lyon, in Bezier, in Manpellier, in Rennes,  
in every corner of the Hexagon, as it's called, of France.  
These protests are gripping this nation  
and affecting every bit of every day and national life.  
We were heading to Les Sions Poe, a university  
in a far quieter catier of Paris.  
That home of so many of the elites who populate the French state.  
So in a very different bit of Paris,  
in the hallowed courtyards of Les Sions Poe,  
which for decades and decades and decades  
has been the place which has churned out technocrats,  
the people who run the French state,  
including Emmanuel Macron himself,  
and there's no better place to come to get an insight

## [Transcript] The News Agents / Why is Paris burning?

into the thinking of those who are currently directing the French state than here.

And we've come to speak to Professor Bruno Pallieri, who is a professor of politics here, to get that insight and the sense of where the politics of this might yet unravel.

So I think, first of all, pension reform in France has always been contentious.

There has been mobilization, and one of the reasons is that French political system is not really keen on negotiation, neither political negotiation.

We are used to have a majority, and this time they don't have a real majority, so they had to find a partner, and the partner was very demanding.

And France doesn't know how to build social compromise as the Germans or the Nordic countries do.

So you have a lot of pension reform in Nordic countries, currently in the Netherlands or in Germany recently, but they've been negotiated and they've been passed via social partners.

I think the situation looks much more close to the UK one.

I think in UK, in Germany, in Italy, you are supposed to wait for being 67 to have the full right to pension.

It is exactly the same in France.

In France, you have to wait until 67 to have a full pension.

If you want to leave earlier, you can, not before 62, but after you can, but if ever you didn't contribute enough years, you will have discounts, which is called a decode.

Exactly like in Germany.

In Germany, you cannot leave before 63 and having contributed 35 years, but if you go on pension at the age of 65, you will have a discount, like in France.

So it's the same thing. What's the difference?

The difference is that in Germany, on average people go on pension at 65 and on average in France at 63.

Is it French people's choice?

Not really, it's employers' choice.

In France, employers don't want to keep elderly workers because they consider them to be too expensive.

## [Transcript] The News Agents / Why is Paris burning?

So what you're saying is that to some extent this is about misunderstanding, in the sense that Macron is saying that you just need to work for the extra two years to receive their full pension. But what you're saying is that for increasing numbers of French workers, that probably isn't even an option because their firms have increasingly been firing, dismissing those older workers. So the question is whether they get to even receive their full pension at all. Absolutely, for half of the French age 55 to 65, it is not an option because they've been sacked before. So they don't understand why they want me to work more and it's not possible. And what do you think the effect on French politics longer term of this is going to be? I have published a study with Paulis Wagner which claims, based on political science findings, that this will feed National Front, Rassemblement Nationale, this extreme right populist party. And the reasons are basically four. One is that those who will be the most impacted are the lower middle class, which are typical voters of the populist radical right parties. Think of who voted more for Brexit than anybody else. It's exactly the same, you know, what Theresa May called just about managing. So this is the kind of people. And they will be hit hard by this reform in the coming months. Second, it's about working. And Paulis Wagner, who wrote the piece with me, has shown that it is really at the workplace that the resentment that lead to the populist vote starts. And the resentment is based on, I'm given order, nobody listened to me and nobody acknowledged my contribution to the production. So I feel excluded even if I'm working, all right? And what is this reform about? You have to be subjected to that two more years. So this is on the substance of the reform. On the format of the reform or the modalities,



## [Transcript] The News Agents / Why is Paris burning?

here again you have many things that feed populism.

First of all, as you may have heard, the government has presented the impact of the reforms in a wrong way.

They pretended that a lot of people would get 1,200 euros as a minimum pension and disappeared through the debate, not to be the case.

So a lot of people said they lied.

And they are lying is one of the populist rhetoric.

Well, no.

The second one, the second populist rhetoric is they don't care of us, right?

And clearly, trying to force this reform, you know, to pass it by force, despite demonstrations, despite opinion polls, despite the unity of prejudice, is a sign of I despise you.

I don't care.

This feeds populism.

So this is why I say that the medium term political consequence will be an increase in the vote for Marine Le Pen.

The problem is that if you look at previous elections, in 2002 there was 20 millions of votes difference between Chirac and Le Pen father.

In 2017 there was 10 millions difference between Macron and Le Pen.

In 2022 it was 5 millions, so you see the trend.

So it's very likely that the next time, if it continues like that, if there is no appeasement, gesture from the government will get a very bad result.

So this could be a tremendous crisis for the Fifth Republic?

For the Fifth Republic, but for Europe.

After Italy having France turning into a populist radical right anti-European movement, this will lead to a really big disaster.

You'd also be amazed at how often in this very French debate the specter of Britain is cited that these protests are to some extent about not becoming us, to avoid what happened to us.

What do you think is at stake in terms of these strikes and the clash between Macron and these strikes?

So on the Macron side, they would like to be able to pass the reform despite the movement so that unions would be structurally weakened.

Because unions have been united, they have mobilized a lot and so if they don't get anything

## [Transcript] The News Agents / Why is Paris burning?

and the only thing they are asking for is the removal of the 64H, they will be weakened because a lot of workers will not turn to the unions because if you ask us to mobilize, it doesn't yield to anywhere. And this is exactly what French leaders have in mind. This is what Thatcher did in the 80s, right? He weakened the union so that there wouldn't be strikes for the next 10 years and you can implement the reforms. He wants a Thatcher movement. He wants really this movement where I don't yield to you. I'm an iron man, if you wish. And unions know that they cannot turn to the workers saying let's go and mobilize, let's go and demonstrate because workers will say what's the point, we don't get anything. So that's the leaders' side and Macron's side. On the union side, it's the same issue. We cannot yield here because if we do that, we know that we will be weakened. But there is a different context as compared to Thatcher. It seems to me that it wasn't at stake at the time in the UK whereas now what union leaders say that if we cannot conduct this, master, negotiate the things, workers will become extremely violent. There is an alternative, which is violence. And we have the yellow jacket as the reference point here. And a lot of unions' leaders, they say that we demonstrate, we say things calmly, strongly, you don't listen to. With the yellow jackets, there were much smaller numbers but they were extremely violent and you yielded to them. To some extent, Macron is a victim of his own success. The manner of his election victory, destroying the old parties of the centre-left and centre-right has left him with few natural partners. He upended French politics as a new entrant to the political marketplace. He shattered the old order. But he hasn't really been able to forge a new one or at least not one which is stable. And as French politics has become more extreme, more polarised, that violence that Professor was talking about has loomed a little bit larger. So we've just walked up sort of flanking the main protest and one of the main central points of conflagration, I suppose as they always are, always the big centre of protest in Paris, is the Place de la République. And currently, as often with these protests, is adorned with graffiti, saying of other things, well, I'm not going to use the word, but you can imagine it begins with F, it's followed by Macron.

## [Transcript] The News Agents / Why is Paris burning?

And at the moment it has an effigy, hangé from Marianne,  
the symbol of the French Republic,  
adorned, sell underneath the words, Liberté, Igalété, Frottonété.  
Hanging from her arm is an effigy of Emmanuel Macron,  
hanging from his neck.  
And I'm pretty sure, very shortly, it's going to be burned.  
We'll be back just after this,  
where we'll be taking you into the heart of Paris protesting at night.  
This is The News Agents.  
It is seriously hitting up.  
Tonight has fallen properly now.  
There are still thousands and thousands and thousands of protestors, demonstrators.  
Glass shattered everywhere, people running away from tear gas,  
and police in there, again, thousands.  
I mean, it is basically pure chaos in central Paris.  
Street after street became enveloped by the chaos.  
More and more police poured in, but it became clear in certain areas.  
They'd lost control.  
French news agencies sent push notifications out  
to say that the French Interior Minister had said  
that over 400 officers had been injured.  
He even said that the protests had been hijacked by anarchist elements,  
the extreme left, who had come to Paris to kill police officers.  
But if that is true, force was met with force.  
The French riot police were indiscriminate at times.  
One member of our own team was hit with a baton.  
We all inhaled tear gas and watched stun grenades fire overhead.  
French social media is flooded with videos of police attacking  
and storming anyone in their way.  
You can barely see 5 to 10 metres in front of you now in central Paris.  
The air is completely thick, viscous air.  
Partly from the smoke of flares, partly from the smoke of tear gas  
from the French police.  
And the police haven't lost control,  
and they don't feel a million miles away from it.  
We've just had to make a pretty speedy exit.  
A series of protesters decided to throw flares.  
Small flares, that's producer Gabriel.  
The French Interior Ministry issued another statement  
saying there have been over 900 fires burning in Paris.  
The streets, the back streets around central Paris  
are full of not only rubbish and detritus of rubbish  
and burnt detritus of rubbish and embers of rubbish  
but also smoke, just ash, ash everywhere.

## [Transcript] The News Agents / Why is Paris burning?

Finger prints here almost look like a type of snow.  
Honestly, the city of lights this evening, this evening.  
I think exactly today we're walking across some of these very streets  
and at the time they are absolutely full.  
But they're still now because they've all been burnt to a crisp.  
There's one way of disposing of rubbish.  
So in the midst of all the chaos, we've found Peter Allen  
who's LBC's Paris correspondent.  
And we just described this slightly absurd scene, Peter.  
We are, you've basically taken refuge.  
You were sitting here, you've sort of taken refuge  
from the chaos outside, and you've sort of ushered us in  
as the proprietor of this restaurant sort of closed up  
obviously behind us because it is very chaotic out there, isn't it?  
You need a break occasionally. It's very chaotic.  
This street just outside was full of demonstrators  
setting fire to dustbins and the like,  
attacking cars, attacking shop windows.  
And inevitably what always happens, they do all this  
and the police turn up, then tear gas is let off.  
And that's always a good time to nip inside somewhere  
and take a break from it all, to charge your phones  
to regroup as it were.  
Inside this Korean restaurant.  
Exactly.  
We spoke to people today, and there are people holding placards  
that say things like, Macron wants us to work till death.  
Now, obviously for those outside of France,  
that would seem faintly absurd at the beginning  
because we're talking about working until 64.  
You've lived here a long time.  
Could you give an insight into explaining that mindset?  
It's all to do with the nature of the French Republic.  
It's based on the social contract.  
Ideology is very, very important to the French  
and they feel that their contract is,  
they expect to do what the state expects them to do,  
but they expect something in return  
and very high up on their list of what they want  
is a happy retirement, a happy social situation,  
one where they can go and enjoy joie de vivre,  
as they say in France, they're not Anglo-Saxons.  
They used the term Anglo-Saxon in a scornful way.  
They think Americans and the British are working all the hours God gave them

## [Transcript] The News Agents / Why is Paris burning?

that they all dropped dead very, very early on  
and don't really go on to have happy retirements.

They don't have the whole of August off.

They don't have enjoyable lunch breaks, for example,  
all these kind of things,

and they just feel that their whole system is under attack.

It's amazing, isn't it?

The universal, pretty universal, the opposition to Macron and his plans have become.

I mean, you might think that a lot of Macron's arguments are rational.

They are rooted in a certain logic about the French retirement system  
and its long-term solvency

and the sheer number of retirees now there are to every worker,  
and yet it's got nowhere,

apart from what we see all around us today.

There's a lot of myths in France.

A lot of something I've noticed living in the French Republic

is that rationality isn't often something that is to the fore in political arguments.

This is the country of liberty, equality, fraternity, ludicrous ideals  
that often don't bear any relation to how the French Republic operates at all  
and yet they profess to live by them.

Now, that sounds very, sort of, very fairy,

that's how France is and if they feel that a system is under attack

but the facts suggest it should be under attack

because of competition in the modern world

because, for example, Emmanuel Macron keeps saying,

he's a young man, he's 45, when he moved into working life

there was something like 10 million retirees.

Now France is getting close to 20 million.

The figures don't add up anymore.

People are healthier now, they're living longer

and the French state can't support that

but that's not enough for the French.

They feel as though you can ignore those kind of facts

and because there's a very, very rich class

they always go on about the 1% over here

who have multi-millions more than they need

to have a nice, comfortable life.

The richest man in the world lives here now, Gerard Arnault.

They just think, well, if people like that have got all the money

why on earth can't it be distributed more fairly

and they can't capitalise and work for them?

Where do you think this is going?

Do you think Macron, is there any scenario in which he bends

because these protests, as has happened before with French presidents

## [Transcript] The News Agents / Why is Paris burning?

they just get out of control?

He wants a legacy, he certainly wants a legacy.  
He wants to be the president who drags France  
kicking and screaming in the modern world  
but it very bluntly.

Peter, thank you so much.

I'll let you go back into the streets.

Thank you very much, we've got to push on now.

Let's go back just after this, as the cleanup begins.

This is The News Agents.

There is no escaping this stuff.

Quite far away from the main action.

The protesters have just appeared again,  
a small number, to set fire to things, set fire to bin bags.

The firemen have just had to appear.

I mean people, there's no exaggeration to say.

You look around in terms of the local residents.

Are you scared?

It is a scary, it is nervy, it is edgy.

It's more than just a protest.

It is disorder of the highest level.

And when we spoke to one resident  
she's having to bring out, watching it out,  
every kind of vessel, bucket, saucepan and so on  
just fill it with water from their flats  
because as she said, there just aren't enough firemen.

They're all being deployed throughout the city  
having to bring out hoses and whatever they can.

They're trying to put some of these fires  
which are themselves being fueled by refuse,  
by weak old refuse, out for fear that if they don't,  
if they wait for a fireman,  
that this becomes something far far worse.

Are you a resident here, sir?

Yeah, I live here.

I mean, I can't understand everything,  
but I'm just concerned about who is going to clean all that  
tomorrow morning and that's not Macron.

Who do you blame for all this?

I mean, no one is to blame.

It's not black or white, but, yeah.

Actually, I don't know what to say, I don't know what to think about it.

I'm just wondering right now who is going to clean that  
and it's not who they expect.

## [Transcript] The News Agents / Why is Paris burning?

It's poor people who are going to clean that tomorrow morning so I guess Macron don't care about it.  
But if you don't do violence, they don't listen.  
So, I mean, I don't have sides.  
I don't know what to think.  
It's okay, but it's hard to have a harsh point of view.  
It's shocking though, isn't it? It's shocking to see.  
Yeah, it's quite shocking, yeah.  
And that is why this is wider, what you just heard there.  
That gentleman just came up to us, just wanted to say that.  
Feeling quite ambivalent.  
On the one hand, his neighbourhood has just been turned upside down and has been set on fire.  
On the other hand, he has sympathy with the people who have been set on fire.  
And that is partly because, as he said, this goes so much more, so much further beyond, retards, retirement.  
This is about a clash of visions of society.  
In a society where politics and ideas within politics and competing visions of society are still so viscerally felt that maybe we've kind of forgotten in Britain.  
So it's Friday morning and we are now waiting at Gardinore about to set off back to London.  
And I suppose as a team, we're just internalising really what happened last night.  
It is quite the thing to witness one of the great European capitals, the great city of lights, descend even temporarily into Anarchy, which is what happened.  
French Interior Ministry has updated their figures this morning.  
As of Friday morning, 457 were arrested.  
441 police injured across France.  
903 fires lit last night in Paris alone.  
And this is just the beginning.  
Every French newspaper this morning talks of a deepening crisis for Macron and the country.  
Emmanuel Macron is betting the credibility of his presidency on restoring the credibility of this country's pension system.  
In some senses, like so many politicians before him, he is motivated by the ghosts of his predecessors, of their long shadows.  
He is convinced, like De Gaulle, the founder of the French Fifth Republic, that despite their love of the politics of the street that is dain for their leaders, their cries of fraternity and equality, that the French, at their core, want to be ruled.

## **[Transcript] The News Agents / Why is Paris burning?**

Want to be ruled and governed.  
Not really by a man, but by a sort of democratic king  
with an iron will to match.  
It is De Gaulle's ghost and Macron's distaste  
for the style of his immediate predecessor, Francois Roulon,  
the so-called Monsieur Normale, which guides his action,  
his imperious, even regal style.  
And we're about to find out just how strong that sense is,  
just how iron his will, one way or the other.  
You get the sense that in the years to come,  
these months may ricochet far for France, perhaps even beyond.  
That's it for this week from the news agents.  
Remember, you can catch up with all of our shows on Global Player.  
Thanks so much as always to our fantastic production team  
on the news agents, Gabriel Radis,  
Ellie Clifford, Georgia Foxwell, Will Gibson-Smith,  
and Rory Simon.  
Our editor is Tom Hughes.  
Our executive producer is Dino Sothos.  
It's presented by Emily Maitlis, John Sobel,  
and me, Lewis Goodall.  
We'll see you all on Monday from Paris.  
This has been a Global Player original podcast and a Persephoneka production.