

Political issues in the struggle against Sarkozy's cuts

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The October 12 day of action in France has highlighted the powerful opposition in the working class to President Nicolas Sarkozy's attack on pensions, including a two-year increase in the retirement age. With another day of action planned and gasoline shortages developing rapidly due to refinery strikes, there continues to be mass popular support for strike action against the cuts. According to opinion polls, 61 percent of the population supports continued strike action.

The government is proceeding with flagrant contempt for public opinion and democratic rights. Like Sarkozy's fascistic targeting of the Roma and France's participation in the Afghan war, the pension cuts were rammed through Parliament despite overwhelming popular opposition. Sarkozy has made clear that he will not back down, saying he will maintain the cuts "until the end."

The irreconcilable conflict between the demands of the banks, which dictate policy to bourgeois governments whether of the nominal "left" or the right, and the social needs of the working class is emerging as the main feature of political life. Workers reject the prospect of working for meager wages until they die. But the European Central Bank (ECB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the French government have made clear that this pension cut is only part of a series of cuts aimed at boosting corporate profitability and competitiveness and imposing the cost of the bank bailouts on the working class.

Two years after the outbreak of the economic crisis, a political balance sheet must be drawn. After giving hundreds of billions of euros to the banks, governments across Europe have forced through social cuts, plant closures and wage reductions. There has been no lack of popular protest and opposition, yet the ruling classes

have largely been able to impose their will on the working class.

This is due to the treachery of the trade unions and their allied "left" parties. The first prerequisite for the development of an effective struggle by the working class is a break with these organizations.

The *Parti Socialiste* (PS), the *Parti Communiste Français* (PCF), the petty-bourgeois *Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste* (NPA) and the unions all hold out hopes that Sarkozy will modify his cuts if enough workers attend protest actions. This perspective has shown itself to be a dead end for the working class in France—as in Greece, Spain, Portugal and elsewhere.

Even as they call protest actions, the unions negotiate the terms of social cuts with Sarkozy. As for the "left" parties, they all maintain "unity in struggle" with the PS, a thoroughly pro-business party. This party's likely 2012 presidential candidate is Dominique Strauss-Kahn, the head of the IMF, which last week released a report praising Sarkozy's pension cuts!

A political confrontation is brewing between the working class and this bankrupt "left" establishment.

In extending their strikes, French workers are striving to break through the straitjacket of ceremonial, one-day protest actions, by means of which the unions have sought to contain and dissipate working class opposition. The ongoing refinery strike shows that the workers have enormous social power, and growing numbers of workers want to deploy this power against the bankers and the government.

This brings the workers into an immediate collision with the unions and creates the conditions for a rebellion against them. It is necessary to strengthen and broaden this incipient revolt, and arm it with new organizational structures and a new political perspective.

The *World Socialist Web Site* proposes that workers build committees of action, independent of the trade unions, in their workplaces. The goal of these committees will be to wage a combined industrial and political struggle against the bosses and the state.

Given the mass popular support for strike action against the cuts and the political ferment developing among students and other layers of the population, a central political task of the committees of action is the preparation of a general strike. The avowed aim of such a strike must be the removal of the Sarkozy government.

The social and political needs of the people can be met only if the government that emerges from this struggle is based on the working class and committed to carrying out a socialist program, including the expropriation of the private fortunes of the super-rich and the nationalization of the banks and major corporations and their transformation into public utilities under the democratic control of the working population.

The financial aristocracy wages class war in a centralized manner, involving the collaboration of governments, banks, the ECB and the IMF across state lines to prepare and implement social cuts, mass layoffs and wage reductions. Notwithstanding the increasingly bitter conflicts between them, all of the national ruling classes are united in attacking the working class.

Workers' struggles will inevitably be defeated unless they likewise take on a coordinated, international form. The policies of Sarkozy in France are not fundamentally different than the austerity policies of governments throughout Europe and North America. An appeal for international class solidarity by workers fighting austerity policies in France will receive enormous support around the world.

The struggle to defend the social conditions of workers in any country is inseparable from a struggle against nationalism and anti-immigrant prejudice. All attempts by governments, trade unions and political parties to channel social opposition along nationalist lines and pit workers in one country against their counterparts in other countries must be emphatically rejected.

The WSWS calls upon workers in France to broaden and deepen the struggle against Sarkozy's cuts, build committees of action to throw off the dead weight of

the unions, and prepare the way for a political struggle for a workers' government and the socialist transformation of Europe and the world.

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