

# Workers face a struggle for power in France

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Police action to break strikes and blockades in the oil sector has not ended France's fuel shortage or curtailed strikes and protests by workers and students against President Nicolas Sarkozy's deeply unpopular pension cuts. The French strike wave is the most developed expression of growing working class resistance to the drive by European governments to impose austerity measures in the face of overwhelming popular opposition.

The refusal of the unions to organize broader strikes or protests against the police attacks on oil blockades must be taken as a serious warning. These organizations will mount no struggle to defend workers from state violence. On the contrary, they are sending Sarkozy a signal that he can employ even greater police violence with their tacit support.

The unions' silence on government strike-breaking is the clearest expression of their hostility to the developing mass movement and their determination to work with Sarkozy to weaken and ultimately defeat it. In this, they are supported by the official "left" parties—the Socialist Party and the Communist Party—as well as the so-called "far left" parties, such as the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA), which provide political cover for the unions and insist that workers look to these agencies of the ruling elite and the state to defend them.

The only major actions approved by the unions are two more one-day national protests, on October 28 and November 6. Such "days of action" are already widely seen by workers as ineffective. Indeed, the first is set to take place the day after the combined houses of Parliament agree on the final version of the pension "reform" bill, which the government is trying to force to a vote in the Senate today.

Under conditions where police repression has failed to crush the strikes, Sarkozy is relying more directly than ever on the unions and the "left" parties to defuse

and suppress the mass movement. Union spokesmen are already promoting the notion that opposition to the cuts is a hopeless cause. They are counting on mounting financial pressures on strikers and the impact of the unions' deliberate isolation of strikes in the oil and transportation sectors to sow exhaustion and resignation.

Buttressed by the middle-class pseudo-left organizations such as the NPA, they promote the absurd and dangerous illusion that the government can be pressured to drop or seriously modify its austerity policies. This despite Sarkozy's repeated declarations that the cuts will be imposed no matter what, and his use of state violence against the workers.

Protest alone will not shift the policies of the government, and those who argue otherwise are encouraging complacency and confusion. They ignore the context in which the austerity drive in France and every other major industrialized country is taking place—the deepest crisis of the world capitalist system since the 1930s.

At the same time, they promote the lie that the Socialist Party—a tried and tested party of the French bourgeoisie which initiated the program of social cuts when it held power in the 1990s—represents a genuine alternative to Sarkozy and the Gaullists. The unions and their "left" allies are seeking to wind down the strike movement and channel popular discontent into the blind alley of support for the Socialist Party in the 2012 presidential election.

The working class is objectively in a fight against the ruling class and its state. The government openly does the bidding of the banks and the financial aristocracy with utter contempt for the democratic will of the people.

The workers' opposition has immense support in the population as a whole, which overwhelmingly opposes the cuts and supports the strike movement. It is critical,

however, that the struggle be consciously conducted as a political fight for power—to bring down the Sarkozy government and replace it with a workers' government.

The first prerequisite for victory is a break with the trade unions and the establishment of new, democratic organizations of working class struggle. The *World Socialist Web Site* urges workers in France to form *committees of action*, independent of the unions and the existing “left” parties, to broaden the strike movement, unite all sections of the working class—the employed and unemployed, native-born and immigrant, union and non-union, young and old—and mobilize behind the immense social power of the working class all of the oppressed layers of society.

The committees will provide a means for French workers to reach out to workers across Europe and internationally who face the same attacks from the same source—the international capitalist class. The crisis can be solved only on a European-wide and worldwide basis, through the revolutionary unification of the international working class.

The committees of action will fight for a general strike to bring down Sarkozy. As the mass movement develops, these committees can be broadened into workers' councils, which will become the organs of working class political power.

Only on this basis can revolutionary socialist policies be carried out to harness and expand the productive forces for the benefit of the people, and end their subordination to corporate profit and the personal enrichment of a tiny elite.

The fight for workers' power is deeply ingrained in the history of the French working class. One hundred and forty years ago next year, the besieged workers of Paris rebelled and formed the Commune. This was the first time in history that the working class took power into its own hands. The Commune was ultimately smashed by the bourgeois government of President Adolphe Thiers, which carried out savage repression.

But the example of the Commune played a critical role in the Russian Revolution of October 1917 and continues to stand as a tribute to the revolutionary capacities of the working class. It is to such traditions of revolutionary struggle that workers in Europe and around the world will return in the coming period.

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