

Perruchot report exposes French unions' ties to the ruling class

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The February 12 publication of a report by legislator Nicolas Perruchot of the Nouveau Centre party (close to the ruling UMP party) on the financing of the trade unions and employers' organizations exposes the anti-worker mechanism of the "social dialogue" in France and Europe.

Though they stressed the report's high quality, the deputies in the National Assembly declined to publish it on November 30, 2011. This is a first in the history of the National Assembly. The government asked the right-wing deputies of the UMP (Union for a Popular Movement) to abstain in the vote, leaving it to the Socialist Party (PS) and its satellite parties to bury the report. Several months later, *Le Point* published the unabridged report.

Nicolas Perruchot declared to the *Revue Parlementaire*: "Commission President Richard Maille told me the day before that he would probably vote in favour of the report. He must have been contacted in between time by Christophe Jacob", the president of the UMP parliamentary group.

What the representatives of the French bourgeoisie fear is that a report showing the financial dependence of the trade on the state and business discredits the unions in workers' eyes. By voting to suppress the report, the deputies aimed to protect the unions from irreversible hostility among workers towards the CGT (General Confederation of Labour) and France's other unions.

"The non-publication of this document has multiplied the allegations and suspicions with respect to the unions", explained CGT General Secretary Bernard Thibault. The CGT leaders, as well the other unions, contested neither the figures nor the content of the report.

On page 165, the report explains: "We see nearly €4

billion [US\$5.3 billion] which are devoted annually to trade union activity in France. The bulk of these funds (90 percent) derive from the exercise of the right to trade union activity in companies and public administration, whilst the direct contributions of trade union members' dues only account for, after tax relief, 3 to 4 percent."

Such subsidies from businesses and the state mean that France's unions need not organize a significant number of workers in order to survive. Only 8 percent of French workers are union members, and bloated union bureaucracies maintain themselves with the assistance and connivance of the ruling class.

These figures reveal the profound integration of the unions into the structures of the state and companies. One can no longer talk of workers' organizations; these are empty shells, led by bureaucratic careerists at the national level in line with the needs of the state and the ruling class.

According to the report, most union resources derive from the employers—who pay roughly €3.5 billion for union representatives through subsidies either through works committees or time off from work for union activity. This sum is divided roughly evenly between the private and public sectors.

The unions participate also in the management of public administrative bodies—parity committees that manage the finances of the social security system, even if the report observes that "they [the unions] do not furnish directly, concretely, services of this nature." This earned them at least €80 million, over and above public subsidies and tax deductions which are worth about €175 million.

While they pocket these windfalls from the state, the unions negotiate cuts in pensions with the state and companies, and more generally the destruction of

workers' social gains.

All the national trade union bureaucracies in Europe play fundamentally the same role. However, even compared to the other European trade union bureaucracies, the French union bureaucracy distinguishes itself by the weakness of its financial support among workers, and its heavy dependence on the state.

Dues payments play a major role in financing the unions in neighbouring countries, with €1,300 million deriving from dues in Germany and €1 billion in the UK, against €110 million to €160 million for France. Denmark and Sweden have 70 and 80 percent of workers unionized respectively, roughly 10 times the percentage in France.

The election of Nicolas Sarkozy as president of the republic marked a significant development in the transformation of the union bureaucracy into an arm of the state. He understood that he could work closely and publicly with the unions to negotiate and impose social cuts, using the national union confederations as the policemen of the working class.

In 2008, the CGT and CFDT (the French Democratic Labour Confederation) signed with the government the "Common Position." The state increased subsidies to the major unions so they would straitjacket the working class and force through a policy of social regression.

The 2010 pension reform carried out by the government met with deep hostility in the working class. France faced a gasoline shortage as workers blockaded refineries in the north and oil depots in the south of France. The government sent CRS riot police to smash the strike and retake the refineries and oil depots.

The physical repression and intimidation meted out to the refinery workers to force them to return to work did not get any support from the CGT to call for a wider struggle of workers. The unions voted the end of the strike, forcing the workers back to work. That was a flagrant illustration of the unions' hostility to a political struggle of the working class against the ruling class.

This defeat of the workers will have serious consequences for the unions, which will have greater and greater difficulty in controlling social movements in the working class.

The Perruchot report underlines the widening gap between workers and the unions: "Public opinion sees

the unions rather as bureaucracies led by bosses than as organizations looking after the interests of their members... Sometimes even this situation is reinforced by suspicion of collusion with the employer, even corruption. Such an evolution can notably happen in the instance where the company management in question encourages it, by way of serving its own interests."

This report also exposes the so-called "far left" parties, like the NPA (New Anti-capitalist Party) and Lutte Ouvrière (Workers Struggle), which insist that only the unions can lead workers' struggles. This amounts to saying that the class struggle must always be controlled by agencies of the bourgeois state.

The working class must wage political struggle against the bourgeoisie, and for that it will also have to enter into conflict with the trade union bureaucracy, which will oppose any real struggle by the workers.



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