

# March 18 protest against social cuts in France: A political dead end

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19 March 2014

Yesterday's trade union protests called against the social cuts of Socialist Party (PS) President François Hollande were a political dead end for workers seeking to fight the austerity measures and the rising threat of fascism and war facing the working class. The Stalinist General Confederation of Labor (CGT) called the protest last month, while stressing that they were "not against" Hollande's Responsibility Pact, which cuts tens of billions of euros in Social Security funding and in corporate taxes.

Such protests, designed to let off steam and hide the unions' role in negotiating and designing Hollande's cuts, offer nothing to workers. They highlight the social gulf between complacent, chauvinist bureaucrats and workers concerned and angry about social cuts, the rising influence of the neo-fascist National Front (FN), and the belligerent, far-right regime the PS is supporting in Ukraine.

The class tensions between these two social layers are increasingly coming to the fore. The unions and the pseudo-left political parties endorsed the PS in the final round of the 2012 elections and are desperate to block opposition to Hollande. CGT leader Thierry LePaon stressed yesterday that this was not an "anti-Hollande protest". Among workers, however, there is escalating anger at the PS.

Elisabeth, a visiting nurse and CGT delegate, said, "The politics of Hollande are horrible, three times over. Things have never been as bad in France as the period since he was elected... Hollande came in, and it is worse than with [right-wing President Nicolas] Sarkozy, who was right-wing. The situation with overtime is impossible. It's a 'caviar left' that we have above us."

She said she had not been following the situation in Ukraine, but that she would not be surprised to see the PS supporting far-right forces: "Our president is quote-

unquote left, but in fact he is right-wing—there is money involved everywhere."

When WSWS reporters noted that LePaon did not oppose the Responsibility Pact, Elisabeth replied: "In another period, protests made things change. Now it's different. The unions are all friends like pigs at a trough. There is an understanding between union leaders ... The unions are not workers' organizations. We poor fools are in the street, and they are in their fancy houses."

She said there had to be a general strike: "We have to bring everything to a halt in this country. It would be easy for us to do. Today, here, what we're doing gets us outside, but we will not get anything from it."

Sophie, a visiting nurse, said: "There are problems with our health insurance and with our salaries. Since 2008 I have not had a raise—that's a pay cut of 10, 12 percent." She said it was impossible to fight the Responsibility Pact with a one-day protest: "President Hollande will do the same things as the right. They all come out of the same school [the National Administration School that trains state officials]. They can't do anything different."

WSWS reporters spoke to Michel, a member of Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Left Party (PG) and a CGT delegate from northern France—where FN leader Marine Le Pen has made major gains in recent elections amid a discrediting of the PS and its bourgeois "left" allies like the PG. Asked what he hoped to accomplish, he replied: "We want to light a spark like we did under Sarkozy, three years ago."

When WSWS reporters pointed out that the CGT sold out the refinery strike three years ago that he was holding up as a model, allowing Sarkozy's pension cuts to pass, he changed the subject: "At the time, the CGT national secretary was [Bernard] Thibault. We, in

the north, we were against him.”

Asked if he had a strategy to fight the FN and fascism in Europe, Michel had nothing to say: “Le Pen, she’s a little girl, she has no balls, she has nothing, no program ... The extremes of society never do anything, but social opposition will always remain present. Everyone is looking to try to find their ideals.”

He said he thought the ideals of the National Resistance Council (CNR)—an alliance between General Charles de Gaulle and the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF), fighting Nazi forces under the aegis of US and British imperialism in World War II—would be revived.

When the WSWs pointed out that the CNR covered up the crimes of French collaboration with the Nazis in order to save capitalism and suppress a socialist revolution after World War II, Michel became angry: “During the war, there was never any collaboration with Germany!” Somewhat embarrassed by his denial of well-known history, he took this back and tried to downplay the issue: “Well, there was, but it was only fascists who were doing it.”

The WSWs also spoke to Denis Turbet-Delof of the national leadership of the *Solidaires* union, a union tied to the anarchist groups and to the pseudo-left New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA). Asked what the purpose of the demonstration was, given that LePaon had said he did not oppose the Responsibility Pact, Turbet-Delof replied: “He said that, but there is an internal debate in the CGT.” He added, “The four trade unions [that called the protest] are very critical of the Responsibility Pact as it was formulated by the government.”

Asked why the FN is rising in France, he admitted that there is a lack of any concern in the “left” parties for the social needs of the working class: “Given the absence of any response to social problems, workers turn to those who say they would do differently.”

Turbet-Delof speaks for a complacent, affluent social layer that, while aware of the rising exploitation of the working class, opposes any mobilization of the working class against the PS and social austerity. Asked about what he would do in the case that the FN came to power in France, he said: “We do not mix political and trade union action. However, we are capable of calling for civil disobedience if we imagine that the government is not acting in line with the general interests of the nation.”

This remark underscores the nationalist, pro-capitalist views of the union bureaucracy. If *Solidaires* have not called for civil disobedience against the PS, it is manifestly because they do not believe that PS attacks on the working class to boost corporate profits are contrary to “the general interests of the nation.”



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