

Mobilize European workers to defend French strikers!

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As oil refinery blockades and occupations, port walkouts and calls for further strike action in defiance of attacks by riot police spread across France, the working class is emerging as the leading force in the struggle against the Socialist Party (PS) government's reactionary labor law. The movement is beginning to spread internationally. There are strike calls in Belgium, where on Tuesday 60,000 people marched in Brussels to protest the right-wing government's social cuts.

Events have rapidly exposed the deep political crisis in Europe, as masses of people across the continent reject European Union (EU) austerity policies.

The PS hoped to quell the growing radicalization of the working class by ramming the labor law through the National Assembly despite mass opposition and crushing whatever protests continued afterwards. Now it has been stunned by the depth of opposition that is erupting against its illegitimate law. Seventy percent of the French population wants the PS to withdraw the labor law, and the government's initial attempts to halt the movement through brute repression have failed.

On Tuesday, as police used water cannon against protesters in Brussels, the PS sent hundreds of riot police to fire rubber bullets, tear gas and water cannon on workers occupying oil facilities at Fos-sur-Mer. Yesterday, police cleared an occupation of a fuel depot at Douchy-les-Mines. Nevertheless, the mobilization of the working class against austerity is continuing to spread.

Twenty-five years after the Stalinist dissolution of the USSR fueled a right-wing shift of all the so-called left parties, an extended period of political disorientation is coming to a close. A movement of the working class has emerged. The wholesale repudiation of the working class, Marxism and socialism that came to dominate in

middle-class intellectual circles after the betrayal of the 1968 French general strike by the Stalinist French Communist Party is being refuted by the objective development of the political crisis of European capitalism and the resurgence of class struggle.

This struggle is rooted in the global crisis and breakdown of the capitalist system, announced by the financial crash of 2008. Since then, particularly in Europe, the working class has had countless bitter experiences with capitalist governments of all stripes, from conservative to social democratic to the so-called radical left Syriza government in Greece. Every one of them took its orders from the banks and deepened the austerity policies of its predecessor.

This international assault on the working class is provoking a powerful and growing reaction: strikes by US telecommunications workers and walkouts by teachers, British junior doctors striking against health cuts, Greek workers on general strike against Syriza's austerity measures, and strikes by government and industrial workers in India and China.

The labor law is the implementation in France of the "structural reform" program demanded by the International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank—the institutional representatives of finance capital. It was worked out in close coordination with Berlin, and in particular with Peter Hartz, the social democrat, trade union operative and author of the Hartz laws imposed in Germany a decade ago to slash workers' wages and social conditions. When protests against the labor law began in March, social democratic officials from Germany, Italy and Portugal gathered in Paris to discuss how to handle the crisis.

The repression bearing down on workers in France is a warning to the international working class. The basic answer of the ruling elite in France and internationally

to the growth of social tensions and working class resistance is to move rapidly toward dictatorship.

It is clear that the state of emergency introduced in France and Belgium shortly after the Paris terror attacks last year was aimed not at Islamist terror networks, which in any case serve as instruments of NATO foreign policy in Syria, but at domestic opposition centered in the working class. The PS is using the emergency powers to smash occupations and assault peaceful demonstrators, threatening them with long prison terms.

The events in France demonstrate how the working class is left with no option but to take the revolutionary road, fighting to bring down pro-austerity governments in France and across Europe. As struggles spread, France and all of Europe are entering into a pre-revolutionary situation.

The indispensable ally of the French, Belgian and Greek workers in this struggle is the European and international working class. It is a basic political task facing workers internationally to support and defend their class brothers and sisters in France against persecution by the PS government.

French workers can make a powerful appeal to workers across Europe, who are carefully following the struggles in France, Belgium and Greece.

Workers must reject all attempts to divide their struggles along national lines. More rabidly nationalist factions of the ruling class, represented in France by sections of the right-wing Republicans and the far-right National Front (FN), are attacking the EU, seeking to exploit the labor law crisis and the disintegration of European social democracy to come to power. Yesterday, FN leader Marine Le Pen issued a statement demanding that the government withdraw the labor law and call new elections.

The European Union of the corporations and banks is a prison for the working class and breeding ground for national chauvinism, militarism and war. It must be overthrown. But a retreat behind national borders on the basis of French, German, British, Greek or any other chauvinism is no less reactionary and destructive of the interests of working people. The only progressive alternative to the European Union is the unification of Europe on a new, revolutionary and egalitarian basis through the coordinated struggle of workers across Europe for workers' power and socialism.

Workers cannot limit their movement to demanding the withdrawal of one or another particularly reactionary law, or the replacement of one pro-austerity government by another. The unification of the struggles of the European working class can proceed only on the basis of a common struggle for socialism in every European country.

This requires a comprehensive political and strategic reorientation of the working class, including the formation of organs of struggle that are independent of the trade unions and all of the political parties and representatives of the ruling elite.

Above all, it requires the building of a new Marxist leadership in the working class, sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International, in countries across Europe to advance the perspective of the United Socialist States of Europe.



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