

Strike wave against labor law spreads in France

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Strikes are spreading in France as transport, nuclear and civil aviation workers joined striking oil refinery workers against the Socialist Party's (PS) "El Khomri" labor reform law.

Workers at the French National Railway (SNCF) began an open-ended strike Tuesday evening, while Paris metro and commuter train workers are beginning indefinite strikes today. Air France pilot unions have called a strike next week, while civil aviation involving air traffic controllers voted a three-day strike beginning on Friday.

On Wednesday, the national and regional train services of the French national railways (SNCF) were hit by rolling strikes, halting around half of train services nationwide. It was the eighth day of industrial action at SNCF since early March, and the first time workers voted an open-ended strike. In addition to opposing the laborlaw, workers are also fighting changes to working times and conditions.

Industrial action halted around some 40 percent of high-speed TGV trains and up to two-thirds of services on other lines and disrupted Thalys services to Belgium and the Netherlands. In the Paris region, only 40 percent of train service operated, whereas 45 percent service was reported in other regions. The SNCF said that about 17 percent of its workforce joined the strike, compared to 10 percent who struck last week.

The three main SNCF unions, led by the Stalinist General Confederation of Labor (CGT), called an open-ended strike, while the PS-linked French Democratic Labor Confederation (CFDT) union withdrew its strike call after claiming that it succeeded in obtaining concessions from the PS.

"This week will be the strongest mobilization in three months now," said CGT General Secretary Philippe Martinez.

Strike action is spreading to civil aviation industry representing air traffic controllers, and yesterday, the Union of Air France pilots (SPAF), representing about a quarter of Air France pilots, issued a two to four day strike notice for the end of next week. These strike calls come after pilots from the majority National Union of Airline Pilots (SNPL) overwhelmingly voted in favour of a six-day strike. Pilots are protesting against wage cuts.

The multiple strikes come as oil refinery workers continued strike action against the labor law that caused oil shortages across France last week. The government sent CRS riot police to violently break up workers' blockades of oil depots.

Four of Total's refineries remain halted. About 20 percent of gas stations were dry or faced shortages on Tuesday.

Yesterday, workers at the operator of Le Havre's oil terminal, which handles 40 percent of French imports, voted to continue the strike until Monday. Nuclear sector workers also voted in favour of a strike.

The escalating industrial unrest points to deep opposition to the labor law, which allows companies more flexibility to fire workers, lengthen the work week and cut wages, in line with the PS' austerity agenda. The government rammed the bill through without a parliamentary vote in the face of overwhelming popular opposition.

The government has repeatedly vowed it would not back down on the overhaul. On Monday, President François Hollande told *Sud Ouest*, "The bill will not be withdrawn. The philosophy and principles of Article 2 [allowing trade unions to negotiate company-level contracts violating the Labor Code] will be maintained."

As anger in the working class spreads, the unions are

being compelled to call strike action to keep political control over the strikes and avoid being outflanked by militant sentiment in the working class. They feared that if they had not called strikes, wildcat strikes would have erupted against the law anyway.

After posing as an opponent of the law and briefly calling for its withdrawal, the CGT has begun toning down its verbal opposition to the law, which the CGT helped negotiate with the government from the outset. Prime Minister Manuel Valls spoke over the phone with CGT head Philippe Martinez, who has refused to publicly comment on the content of the “secret” talks he had with Valls.

Yesterday, *Le Monde* asked itself: “Is the CGT changing its strategy in its frontal assault on the labor law?” It wrote, “The question is out in the open since the statements of its general secretary, Philippe Martinez, during a May 30 debate on RTL with CFDT leader Laurent Berger. Asked about whether the withdrawal of the law was still a 'precondition' for opening discussions with the government, Martinez replied, “There are no preconditions. We have been waiting three months to have a chance to have discussion. He added that 'an acceptable solution' is being sought.”

The paper reported that high-ranking CGT officials were looking for “an exit from the crisis.” A source close to the CGT leadership told the paper, “Philippe Martinez has understood that he cannot hold indefinitely on a line demanding the withdrawal of the law.”

These events fully confirm the WSWs's analysis of the treachery of the union bureaucracies and their supporters among the pseudo-left parties, such as the New Anticapitalist Party (NPA), which are totally hostile to the working class and its struggles.

As broad layers of the working class enter into struggle, the fight against the PS' agenda of austerity and war must be organized independently of the unions and their political allies. As long as workers' struggles remain under their control, they will seek to divide, sabotage and sell out the successive mobilizations of the working class as they erupt, while also allowing the repressive powers of the state to be mobilized against strikers, as the media and the ruling class are increasingly demanding.

As the unions are preparing to betray workers'

struggles, the media and the ruling class are denouncing striking workers as terrorists and threats to national security. Yesterday, Franz-Olivier Giesbert wrote an editorial in *Le Point* titled “Don't give in to the CGT, for God's sake!”

Giesbert provocatively compared the CGT with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). While acknowledging that such a comparison “could appear scandalous,” he went on to denounce strikers, writing: “France today faces two threats that, while they may be different, both threaten its integrity: ISIS and the CGT.”



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