

French unions boost pressure to end strike movement against labor law

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For several weeks, French workers have been waging strike struggles against the Socialist Party (PS) government's regressive labor law. Seeking to exploit the absence of political leadership in the working class in opposition to the PS, the union bureaucracy and its pseudo-left allies such as the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) are isolating strikers industry by industry in an effort to shut down the movement.

Only a few days before a national protest set for June 14, amidst a media campaign attacking strikers for detracting from the Euro 2016 football tournament, the unions are negotiating with the PS to put an end to the strikes.

All of France's refineries went on strike last month hours after riot police brutally smashed picket lines blockading oil depots at Fos-sur-Mer. Now, oil terminals at Le Havre have resumed operations. This allows Total refineries at Gonfreville-l'Orcher and Grandpuits, the ExxonMobil refinery at Notre-Dame-de-Gravenchon, and kerosene resupply operations for Roissy and Orly airports in Paris to function normally.

Thierry Dufresne, a Stalinist General Confederation of Labor (CGT) union delegate at Gonfreville-l'Orcher, declared, "Once the operations to restart the refinery are engaged, we cannot go back." This is the CGT's signal that it is pushing to end the refinery strike.

At union local meetings, the CGT is using the fact that workers are on "reconductible" strikes, requiring daily votes to continue strike action, to pressure workers to end the movement. According to *Le Monde*, "For its part, the Total refinery in Normandy is also preparing to restart operations after striking workers voted in the morning to end the movement. Just the night before, however, they had voted twice to continue the strike."

At Air France, where pilots launched strike action over the weekend, management reported that 27 percent of pilots were on strike. It added that 85 percent of long-haul flights and 70 percent of shorter flights are being guaranteed. The right-wing daily *Le Figaro* has reported that the strike should end on the evening of June 14.

At the National Railway (SNCF), the number of trains running despite the strike is increasing, with 90 percent of high speed trains (TGV), 70 percent of express regional trains (TER), 60 percent of Paris-area trains, and 50 percent of Inter-city trains running, according to management.

After CGT members blockaded garbage incinerators and garbage truck garages across the Paris and Marseille areas, the garbage strike is also under threat. To crush the garbage workers' movement in Paris that began May 30, Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo (PS) called on private enterprises to collect the trash. Unions authorized garbage trucks driven by non-strikers to circulate, thus helping the PS to organize the breaking of the garbage strike.

The CGT union, like its political allies the Left Front and NPA, called for a vote for the PS in 2012, supports the PS government, and fears a broader mobilization of the working class that could escalate into a political struggle against the government. It is therefore isolating workers industry by industry and seeking to block a broader movement, despite overwhelming popular opposition to the law. Either by direct sabotage or by demoralizing workers by pressing them to return to work, it is working with the PS to arrange the winding down of the struggle.

Even after the PS sent riot police to forcibly break picket lines at oil depots and refineries, CGT General Secretary Philippe Martinez insisted that he wanted to

negotiate with the government. In an interview on BFM-TV at the end of last month, Martinez indicated that the CGT was preparing to sell out the strike.

He declared: “For the first time in two months, I received a call from the prime minister. It is much better when he is not engaged in political posturing!” Asked by the reporters to tell the public what he had discussed with Prime Minister Valls, however, Martinez refused. “Secret conversation,” he replied.

Now, a meeting has been scheduled for June 17 between Martinez and Labor Minister Myriam El Khomri, who is charged with direct oversight of the law. In this meeting, the topic for discussion will be how to organize the “deblockading” of the country in negotiations allowing the CGT to push for an end to the strike, even though no substantial changes to the labor law have been made.

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These treacherous maneuvers of the union bureaucracy underscore the bankruptcy of those parties, like the Left Front and the NPA, that insisted the struggle could develop under the leadership of the trade unions. These parties, closely linked to the PS, have proved hostile to a struggle against a law that is strongly opposed by 75 percent of the population.

It would be fatal in this situation to leave the struggle in the hands of unions determined to reach a compromise with the financial aristocracy and restrict the struggle to France. The ongoing strike action against the labor law must be taken out of the hands of the trade unions and joined with rising opposition in the working class internationally.

It is increasingly clear, moreover, that a struggle carried out by a few isolated sections of the working class will not be victorious, faced with a ruling class determined to use all means necessary to crush opposition and impose its austerity diktat.

The only way forward is through the building of new organizations that can mobilize the growing political opposition to the PS government in France and to the European Union across Europe. This opposition, which exists within far broader layers of the working class, must be directed on the path of revolutionary struggle. This means building revolutionary parties of the working class fighting for socialism on a European and international scale.

Workers have already mobilized in struggle against austerity across the EU, and the French strikes enjoy the support and sympathy of workers internationally. Strike movements against austerity in Belgium and Greece, like the rising militancy of workers in Germany and Britain, reflect the objective potential to organize an international struggle of the working class against austerity, attacks on democratic rights such as the French state of emergency, and the drive to war.



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