

Gasoline and chemical truck drivers strike in France

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Most truck drivers transporting dangerous materials in France went on strike on Friday and continued strike action throughout the weekend and on Monday.

Blockades were set up in front of fuel depots both in the provinces and the Paris area. Only one fuel depot in the Paris metropolitan area was functioning normally on Saturday according to *Agence France-Presse*. There are widespread reports of possible major fuel and gasoline shortages across the country.

Drivers transporting dangerous materials (gasoline, natural gas and chemical products) are demanding a large increase in hourly wages from the current miserly level of €9.73 (US \$10.82), which is three cents less than the official 2017 minimum wage for a dangerous and stressful job; a 13th month bonus at the end of each year; limiting the working day to 10 hours; and regular medical check-ups. Earlier this year, in April, drivers in several trucking firms operating at the European level went on strike to raise similar demands.

The Stalinist General Confederation of Labor (CGT) and Workers Force (FO) unions are insisting that this strike—the last since the mobilization of millions of workers and youth last year against the reactionary labor laws pushed by the previous Hollande government—should be limited to trade union action in one industry.

In early May, the CGT and FO had proposed to include some of these demands in an industry-level contract for road transport. Employers' representatives refused, however. Now they are proceeding despite union threats of a strike, which has prompted the CGT and FO to ask the corporations to return to the negotiating table.

The CGT and FO are carefully seeking to avoid any serious interruption of industry and transport. When the blockade at the Donges refinery proved to be too

effective, they suspended it.

“At Donges, we saw there were a few worries about fuel stocks at the Nantes airport, so we freed up a few trucks,” a CGT delegate told the press.

The unions are organizing the blockade so that most of the depots are not fully blocked, but simply sending out trucks more slowly than at normal times. The bosses are acting ruthlessly against the strikers, however, as a CGT spokesperson admitted, “The transport companies are hiring scabs and giving an exceptional €100 bonus to drivers who work.”

The government of newly-elected French President Emmanuel Macron also apparently acted to make sure gas stations and oil depots had large reserves before strike action began.

Despite the deep anger over deteriorating social conditions felt by the working class in France and across Europe, the trade unions are doing everything they can to block political opposition to Macron prior to next month's legislative elections. Their goal is to stabilize this government, which intends to pursue and intensify Hollande's austerity policies.

The only way forward for the working class is to take the struggle out of the hands of the trade union bureaucracy and to develop it as a political movement against the Macron administration. The unions' initial discussions with Macron have made clear their willingness to collaborate with him. They are accepting the principle of imposing stepped-up austerity using Hollande's labor law, in the context of the ongoing French state of emergency, which allows the government to suspend basic democratic rights and violently attack strikes and protests.

The unions are calling strikes they know they cannot prevent to have something to “negotiate” with Macron and to hide their basic political alignment with his

administration. The political parties tied to the trade union bureaucracy, like the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF) or the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA), both made clear that they supported Macron in the election, insisting that backing the former investment banker and militarist was the only way to stop neo-fascist candidate Marine Le Pen.

Now the unions are promoting the illusion that workers can achieve their demands by exerting pressure on Macron.

Last year, the CGT did everything, under the slogan of “generalizing strikes,” to block a general strike that threatened to develop against Hollande’s labor law. While CGT leader Philippe Martinez carried out back-channel talks with then-Prime Minister Manuel Valls, his union federation played the key role in keeping Hollande in power so he could impose the labor law—which he did using anti-democratic emergency provisions in the French constitution allowing him to ram the law through without a parliamentary vote.

The emergence of the working class in struggle only a few weeks after Macron’s election on May 7 confirms the correctness of the *Parti de l’égalité socialiste*’s (PES) perspective in the presidential elections. It warned that the working class would face bitter struggles against the next president. Unlike the CGT and the NPA, which aligned themselves on the media consensus calling for an “anti-Le Pen vote” for Macron, the PES called for an active boycott of the election.

The PES was and is seeking to arm the working class with a perspective for a struggle against Macron, which is politically independent from all the capitalist parties, whose plans the trade unions are trying to impose, perhaps with a few minor modifications, on workers.

Workers will face a long and protracted struggle against Macron who is determined to carry out a frontal assault against workers’ social rights. What is needed is a clear revolutionary perspective, that is socialist and internationalist. Since road transport is organized on a European-wide level and beyond, the mobilisation of French workers in industrial and political struggle can be effective only to the extent that it is coordinated with workers in Europe and internationally.

Workers should take the conduct of this struggle out of the hands of the trade unions by electing action committees to extend the strike, broaden the struggle to

other layers of workers, including oil and transport workers, and mobilize their class brothers and sisters in other countries in struggle.



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