

French truckers take strike action against Macron's labor decrees

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Members of the transport federations of the General Confederation of Labor (CGT) and Workers Force (FO) unions are carrying out 50 blockades and go-slow operations across France to protest President Emmanuel Macron's labor decrees. However, the CGT and FO are deliberately isolating the truckers' strike in an effort to dissipate the resistance of the working class and block the emergence of a broader, revolutionary struggle against the austerity policies of Macron and the European Union.

Amid growing public hostility to the labor decrees, the same unions that negotiated the measures with Macron have called rolling strikes in various industries so as to prevent the opposition from escaping their control. At the same time, they are issuing bankrupt appeals to Macron.

FO Transport leader Michel Dey declared, "We must be heard, finally. They must stop acting deaf, otherwise it will be a big, big movement." The CGT is warning drivers to "fill up your tank pretty soon" to deal with fuel shortages.

Truckers fear Macron's decrees, which would allow employers to slash bonuses and facilitate sackings by limiting damages for unfair dismissal for the supposed purpose of improving French competitiveness against Eastern European competition. It would also enable employers to end a program that allows some truckers to retire at 57.

Go-slow operations in western, northern and eastern France have created traffic jams, including on highways toward Brussels and Luxembourg. At Gennevilliers, in the Paris suburbs, the CGT distributed leaflets near a Total fuel depot guarded by riot police.

Government spokesman Christophe Castaner declared Monday that negotiations were continuing with the striking truckers. He also said that the French

population "should not be kept from going to work" and warned of possible fuel shortages.

To avoid such shortages, the government moved ahead on Friday with a decree allowing fuel transport companies to temporarily violate rules on minimum rest times and maximum working hours. According to the Mon-essence.fr web site, at least 40 gas stations out of 3,000 are currently "totally out" of fuel.

The government fears that the truckers' strike could create a fuel shortage as occurred during strikes in 2010 against President Nicolas Sarkozy's pension cuts and in 2016 against the Socialist Party's labor law. Both of those governments were badly weakened by the strikes, eventually calling out riot police to smash the strikes and blockades at refineries and fuel depots. The trade unions and their pseudo-left political allies organized no opposition to the state attack on the strikers, effectively strangling the movement.

On Monday, riot police reportedly intervened to keep workers from blockading refineries and fuel depots by arriving early, before the striking truckers. In Caen and in Toulouse, they broke up blockades earlier in the day.

Whatever their rhetoric, the CGT and FO have no intention of forcing Macron to back down. They will not blockade strategic sectors of the economy for fear of undermining Macron, with whom they have carefully worked on the negotiation and imposition of the decrees.

"This is not a movement defending just one industry, it is part of a global challenge to Macron's decrees," said Fabrice Michaud, secretary of the CGT-Transport federation on Monday. He insisted that there had been no plan to blockade Total's refinery in La Mède, but that "circumstances" led to a blockade there.

Michaud concluded, "We will see how the government reacts, but for now it seems to be playing

tough. But nothing is decided for now. We will try to bring diversity into our movement.”

A meeting is planned between the transport unions and the employers’ organizations under the auspices of the government. Their goal is to end the strike in exchange for at most a few crumbs, which will allow the state and the unions to maintain Macron’s decrees.

The trade unions are hostile to unifying workers in France and across Europe in a struggle against austerity. None of the transport unions have called on refinery and fuel depot workers to mobilize in solidarity with the truckers. Nor have they called on other sections of workers to mobilize against Macron. The union officialdom views Macron’s anti-worker decrees as a boon to their policy of collaborating with the employers in attacking workers’ social rights and labor conditions.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon of Unsubmissive France tweeted: “Opposition to Macron’s social coup d’état only keeps growing.” But in the September 23 protest, he demanded that workers support only those strikes called by the unions, declaring: “I am trying to get the right dose for the protests. I will not send you all crashing into a wall.” By allowing the unions to pick the “right dose” of strike action—that is, to isolate actions and restrict them to France despite rising opposition to austerity across Europe—Mélenchon is acting to block an international, revolutionary struggle of the working class.

In the face of the determination of the unions and their political allies to divide workers’ struggles and stabilize Macron, workers can unite across France and internationally only through a break with these right-wing, nationalist organizations. A new political vanguard must be built in the working class along with the creation of new, democratic organizations of struggle in which workers can discuss anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist and socialist demands corresponding to the needs of the masses.



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