

# French rail workers, teachers protest Macron's social cuts

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Four trade unions called a strike and protest Thursday, May 3 against French President Emmanuel Macron's social reforms, as rail workers entered into their seventh two-day strike against the planned privatization of the French National Railways (SNCF). The unions claimed they were pressuring Prime Minister Edouard Philippe, though he had stressed that the pre-condition for his upcoming talks with them is their agreement to all the key elements of the SNCF reform.

Students, retirees, rail workers as well as teachers and striking Air France workers held protests in Paris and the provinces. They were called out by the Stalinist General Confederation of Labor (CGT), National Union of Autonomous Unions (UNSA), Workers Force (FO), and the Solidarity-Unity-Democracy (SUD) rail federation.

WSWS reporters attended the Paris demonstration, where they spoke to Joël, a FO trade unionist. He explained that he had come to force Macron to withdraw his planned privatization of the SNCF: "As for me, what I am concerned about at the SNCF is ending his plans, and we at FO want a single, undivided SNCF returned to its status as a public monopoly."

He stressed the repercussions for rail workers and workers in general of Macron's reforms and the opening of the railways to competition: "The consequences will be serious. Then they will go after our contracts and pensions. ... Macron wants to destroy the SNCF and later the entire public service. He wants to destroy the social rights and wages of every so-called privileged sections of workers, but we don't want to pay for their crisis. Privatization is much closer than people think, there are already job differences with colleagues I meet in the dressing rooms at work. Macron attacks the workers, youth and students to

defend the rich. He robs the poor to give to the rich."

On the US-UK-French missile strikes on Syria, Joël said Macron "should have more important things to do than bomb Syria, but he stupidly follows whatever the last presidents did. I have no idea, he must be trying to find allies abroad and to make himself well regarded over there, because here people don't like him. I certainly didn't vote for him."

Asked about the link between hundred-billion-euro planned increases in French military spending and the attacks on workers social rights, he said, "Everything is a matter of money. Just at my own smaller level, we see in our everyday life that they are taking money from us. Macron wants to put money into the army, it's obvious what he wants to do and I'm not for it."

As for the trade unions' strategy in the rail struggle, Joël explained: "I think the strike is not hard enough. Unfortunately, even if the percentage of strikers is still high, at the SNCF at least, it seems hard to go out on a longer-term strike action with 30 percent of SNCF workers striking."

WSWS reporters also met Nicolas, a high school teacher protesting reforms to the baccalaureate (*bac*) and universities.

He said, "The level of support set up by the reforms are bad for our students. In the secondary level, we are not too much short on funding, but we have fewer hours to spend on our students, particularly in high schools in working class areas. The reform of the *bac* that abandons the universality of that degree will create a two-speed diploma. Students at the good high schools will be promoted and the less well regarded high schools will have a cheap *bac*. In the universities, the law goes against the principle that education is a right open to all students."

Nicolas said these reforms would effectively prevent

many students from having access to university education, “especially those coming from high schools where they already face discrimination.”

He stressed the link between the struggle of the rail workers and those of other sections of the working class: “We think it’s a broader attack on public services that is taking place in the rest homes, hospitals, public education, the railways, etc.”

Stressing his attachment to the public service, Nicolas said he believes Macron’s goal is the diminish “as much as possible the public service and the weight of the state and let the market take care of education and health: the public service is inevitably bad, competition is good—except this is not true.”

Like Joël, Nicolas spoke out in solidarity with struggles of workers in other countries: “There is a common struggle against all these cuts that were put in place 20-30 years ago in Germany and in Britain that we have to manage to wage.”



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