

Build rank-and-file committees to unify struggles against austerity in France!

The Socialist Equality Party (France)
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This is an English translation of a statement being distributed by supporters of the Parti de l'égalité socialiste in cities across France for the October 9 day of action called by trade and student unions against the policies of French President Emmanuel Macron.

A year after Emmanuel Macron was elected president with European Union support, his policy of police-state repression and all-out austerity is rejected by the overwhelming majority of French people. Well beyond those who are marching today at the call of the trade unions, social anger with revolutionary implications is emerging against the government. Government ministers are leaving in droves, terrified by Macron's collapse in the polls.

But Macron is impervious to mass anger. After privatizing the National Railways (SNCF) and cutting railworkers' wage levels this spring, he plans to slash pensions, health care, unemployment compensation and public sector wages. The unions' perspective of negotiating "reforms" with him is a trap and an illusion. The choice is between Macron's counterrevolution and a struggle to bring down his government; the question facing workers is how to mount a revolutionary struggle.

The key question is unifying the different struggles against Macron and linking them to the growing movement in the working class around the world.

In 1935, as workers' struggles rose before the French general strike of 1936, Leon Trotsky, the founder of the Fourth International, called for the formation of committees of action. He explained that these rank-and-file organizations, built independently of the union bureaucracies, could be the revolutionary representation of the struggling masses. This is the alternative to the trap posed to the workers by the unions' "social dialog" with Macron, which aims to repudiate all the

social and democratic rights won by the struggle of workers in Europe in the 20th century.

It is time for a balance sheet of this spring's struggle against the privatization of the SNCF and his university reform. Despite opposition to Macron's plans from 95 percent of SNCF workers, the unions only organized rolling strikes which they then stabbed in the back, signing Macron's cuts even as strikes continued. If they organized a defeat against such a weak government despite mass railworkers' support, there is no struggle they cannot run into the ground.

Despite strikes at Air France, Carrefour and French hospitals, of British railworkers and teachers, of US teachers, and of German and Turkish metalworking and engineering industries, they isolated the rail strike and the student movement against Macron. Even as the youth tried to turn to the working class, the state was left to send in riot police to smash the student blockades at the universities.

As for the "new Popular Front" formed by the New Anti-capitalist Party, Workers Struggle and Unsubmissive France (LFI) this spring, supposedly to help the unions pressure Macron, it exerted no pressure on Macron at all. It simply supported the union bureaucracy's disorganization of the struggle and its defence of its own privileges. Now, LFI is inviting right-wing legislators to discuss military strategy at its summer school, and LFI leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon is boasting that he sees common ground with the right in the struggle against Macron.

The way forward is a revolutionary struggle carried out independently of the bankrupt French union bureaucracies, which are financed by the state and the employers, and their political allies. Fixated on an anti-Marxist strategy of using working-class discontent only for tactical help in negotiations of social austerity with

Macron, they will produce nothing but defeats.

Fifty years ago, the French working class took the leadership out of the hands of the unions and the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF) and launched the May 1968 French general strike, bringing French capitalism to the verge of collapse. Today, however, there will be no outcome like the Grenelle Accords and social concessions, however limited, for the strikers. French capitalism, deindustrialized and financialized over the last half century, has no resources for that: it demands massive tax breaks for the billionaires and hundreds of billions of euros for the army.

Faced with the bankruptcy of capitalism, a new generation of workers and youth is preparing around the world to take the road of a struggle for socialism. The support of masses of American youth for socialism and communism, and the desire of a majority of young Europeans to participate in a mass uprising against the existing social order, are so many warning signs of the revolutionary storm that is to come.

The struggle to build committees of action is now on the order of the day. In 1935, Trotsky explained in *Whither France* that these committees were the “only means of breaking the anti-revolutionary opposition of the trade union and party apparatus.” Comparing them to the soviets formed by Russian workers in 1917, through which the workers took power during the October Revolution under the leadership of the Bolsheviks, he wrote:

“Committees of Action at their present stage have as their task to unite in a defensive struggle the toiling masses of France and thus imbue these masses with the consciousness of their own power for the coming offensive. Whether matters will reach genuine soviets depends on whether the present critical situation in France will unfold to the ultimate revolutionary conclusions.”

The Parti de l'égalité socialiste (Socialist Equality Party—PES), the French section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), urges the broadest discussion of this perspective in workplaces, schools and on the Internet. It calls on those who want to participate in this struggle to join and build the PES.

While calling for and assisting in the formation of committees of action by the workers, the PES will struggle for the broadest consciousness of the revolutionary and international character of the

developing movement. It will struggle to tie the emergence of strikes to all forms of workers' opposition to war, austerity and social inequality, and to develop a socialist and internationalist movement to transfer state power to the working class and reorganize economic life on the basis of social need, not private profit.



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