

# French teachers mobilize against Macron's attacks on education

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Teachers across France struck on November 12 against the 2019 education budget of the government of Emmanuel Macron. It was the first time the trade unions have called a national education strike since 2011.

The first day of action involved close to one in two secondary and one in four elementary school teachers, according to union officials. The ministry claimed a far lower figure of 10 percent participation in the strike. Approximately 4,000 teachers protested in Paris; 1,000 in Marseille; 2,500 in Lyon; 850 in Nantes; 800 in Caen and 700 in Clermont-Ferrand, according to the police prefectures.

The educators are opposing the cutting of 2,650 positions in public middle schools and high schools, another 550 positions in the private sector, and 400 administrative positions. These cuts are outlined in the national education budget of 2019 that was discussed yesterday in the National Assembly, under conditions where the education ministry's own statistical agency predicts that the number of secondary students will increase by 40,000 each year between 2019 and 2021.

To compensate for the destruction of full-time positions, Minister of Budget, Public Accounts and Civil Service, Gérald Darmanin, proposes to utilize more contract teachers in place of recruiting more teachers via examinations. This has provoked opposition among teachers, who fear the destruction of existing labour protections and a massive increase in precarious work in the national education system.

At the Paris demonstration, *World Socialist Web Site* reporters met Caroline, a high school teacher who said she came to "protest against the job cuts forecast for next year, in particular at high schools." Concerning contract positions, she explained, "these are already common. There are many different tiers between

associate teachers, contractors and certified teachers. This has created inequalities because we are not paid the same, even though we are performing the same work in the same conditions."

Caroline also stressed that the cutting of positions would lead to an increase in class sizes, "which will cause more difficulties for schools and dropout rates."

Another subject of anger for teachers is the planned reform of professional training school pathways, which is aimed at merging the professional high school stream with apprenticeship training centres. General subjects such as French, history and mathematics would see their hours cut, damaging the overall culture of the youth.

Finally, teachers have seen their conditions of work decline. France's teachers are among the worst paid in the European Union, their pay having been frozen over several years even as their workloads have continued to grow. According to the French statistics institute INSEE, a typical secondary school teacher works for 41 hours a week, well above the official 35 hours.

The teachers' strike in France is part of a wave of struggles and international radicalization of teachers and other workers since the beginning of 2018.

In March, 33,000 West Virginia teachers in the US struck for nine days in a rebellion against the trade unions, opposing the paltry wage increases negotiated between the education unions and the state government. In response to local walkouts and growing unrest among teachers across the state, the unions called an initial two-day strike, which they hoped would let off steam among teachers and permit the unions to reach a deal with the governor and legislators.

After two days, the unions returned with a rotten sell-out deal and demanded that teachers return to work. Educators responded by calling impromptu meetings

across the state and voting to reject the return-to-work order.

The teacher strike in West Virginia expanded across multiple states, joined by strikes of telecommunications and autoworkers, as part of an international strike wave of educators that included Britain, Kenya and Argentina.

A great social anger exists among workers against the Macron government, whose economic policies were approved by 6 percent of the population, according to a poll by Elabe. Conscious of the rebellion by teachers in the US against the corporatist and anti-working class trade unions, and the support for the teachers in the working class, the French education unions called a single day of action. Their hope is to use the attack to diffuse anger and avoid a rebellion, while they negotiate attacks against the social rights of the workers and the financing of the military as part of their “social dialogue” with Macron.

Educators and workers cannot place any faith in the unions, who are not opposed to the austerity policies of the Socialist Party or of Emmanuel Macron. They have made no effort to mobilize workers against austerity over the past seven years, and have isolated French teachers from the growing strike wave by educators internationally, the strike of French railway workers, and other sections of workers in struggle in France and Europe.

Workers must instead draw the lessons from the experience of the railway workers’ struggle against the privatization of the national railway network and the destruction of the labour code—a struggle betrayed by the unions.

While railway workers are historically among the most combative sections of the working class, Macron was able to bide his time for months, allowing the unions to strangle the railway workers through a series of demoralizing slowdowns, in order to proceed with his attacks. At the time, energy workers and students were also engaged in struggle against Macron’s policies. But the unions, supported by the New Anti-Capitalist Party and by Jean-Luc Melenchon, isolated the different strikes in defiance of the desire among workers to unify their struggle against Macron.

To wage a successful fight against Macron it is necessary for teachers to take the struggle into their own hands and organize themselves independently

from the union apparatuses by building independent rank-and-file workplace committees elected by and from among workers themselves. These committees are necessary in order to lead and unify the struggles of teachers with those of workers across France and around the world against the profit system, which is responsible for gutting public education and attacks on the conditions of workers more broadly.



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