

French public sector strike: Build independent committees of action for political struggle against Macron

Anthony Torres
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The following statement is being distributed by supporters of the Socialist Equality Party to workers and young people participating in Thursday's public sector strike across France.

Today's strike against pension cuts in France will mark a major escalation of the class struggle. A year after the eruption of the "Yellow Vest" protests against social inequality, the government has only intensified the attacks on the working class. Now rail, transit, airline, hospital, energy and port workers, together with students and lawyers groups, will strike and march. The strike has the support of two-thirds of the public, polls show, including 74 percent of manual workers and 70 percent of public-sector workers.

It is part of a vast international resurgence of the class struggle this year. In Chile, Bolivia, Hong Kong, Iraq, Lebanon, Sudan, Algeria and beyond, workers and youth are mobilizing in protests driven by opposition to obscene levels of social inequality. Forty thousand Polish teachers waged the first national strike since the Stalinist regime restored capitalism in 1989, and GM autoworkers joined miners and teachers in taking strike action in the United States.

Terrified of this growing social anger and alerted by French railworkers' wildcat strikes this autumn, the French union bureaucracies and allied pseudo-left political parties reluctantly decided to call strike action, fearing that otherwise strikes would erupt outside their control. Now, workers are eagerly taking the opportunity reluctantly offered to them by the unions.

Workers must be warned: the unions, which opposed the "Yellow Vest" protests, oppose a movement against Macron. Just as in the period before they called the strike, they will do everything they can to block a mass

movement of workers against the government. Thus, Laurent Escure of the National Union of Autonomous Unions (UNSA) warned employers that "anger is festering in some industries" and asked them to "decide on reforms as fast as possible" because "if we do after the 5th, we will be in the danger zone."

The way forward is for workers to take the struggle out of the hands of the unions, building their own action committees, independent of the unions and their political allies. Already, workers at meetings are chanting: "The strike belongs to the strikers!"

Workers have seen how the "Yellow Vests" organized independently on social media. They will need their own action committees, where they can freely discuss and decide on what actions should be taken and connect them to the growing international movement of the working class.

There is nothing to negotiate with Macron, who will give only tear gas to the workers. There will be no national "reform" after decades of capitalist globalization, run by billionaire aristocrats.

An international revolutionary confrontation is emerging between the working class and the financial aristocracy, represented in France by the banker-president Macron. The only progressive solution to the international problems of social inequality and military-police repression that are driving protests internationally is the expropriation of the financial aristocracy.

In this explosive global context, "social dialog" organized by the unions has nothing to offer to the working class. In every country, the unions are empty shells, having lost their working class base and obtained financing instead from businesses and the

state. This follows decades in which they imposed wage and benefit cuts to ensure the competitiveness of *their* capitalists on the world market. The French unions, having opposed the “Yellow Vest” protests, will now maneuver to obtain a rotten sell-out deal with the state and employers’ groups and impose it on the workers.

Workers must reject the predictable attempts by the unions and their petty-bourgeois political allies, such as the New Anticapitalist Party (NPA) and Workers Struggle (LO), to intervene and disorganize, sabotage or otherwise strangle workers’ struggles. These parties’ actions, based on the authority conferred to them by the state-financed “social dialog,” have no legitimacy whatsoever.

Nearly three decades after the Stalinist regime dissolved the Soviet Union in 1991, imperialist wars in the Middle East and rising social inequality have undermined European capitalism’s social pretensions. In France, after collaborating with the Nazis during World War II, the ruling class promised to carry out “the eviction of great economic and financial aristocracies from rulership over the economy.” This could not be realized under capitalism, however, and the financial aristocracy is now rapidly pushing for a police-state dictatorship to preserve its wealth and attack the workers.

Since 2011, NATO has used Islamist terror networks for its own purposes in dirty proxy wars in Libya and Syria. After these networks carried out terror attacks in France, the Socialist Party (PS) imposed in 2015 a state of emergency suspending democratic rights. It made use of this police state measure to violently repress protests against a labor law that effectively suspended the Labor Code. Despite opposition from 70 percent of the population, the PS then imposed the law without even a vote in Parliament, using an anti-democratic provision of the French Constitution.

In 2017, Macron had his dubious majority in the National Assembly—elected by less than half of French voters amid mass abstention—issue decrees sharpening the PS’ reactionary labor law. Macron used them to facilitate mass sackings and salary cuts, slash unemployment insurance for millions of people, and partially privatize the National Railways (SNCF). He carried out all these policies with the complicity of the unions, which acquiesced to the state of emergency and

organized only a few impotent, token strikes at the SNCF.

Now Macron wants to scrap France’s various pension programs and replace them with a single system of retirement “by points,” whose monetary value the state could determine arbitrarily as each worker retires.

Workers opposing this attack face a direct political struggle against the Macron government, and behind him the international financial markets. Against the “Yellow Vest” protests, Macron tried to rehabilitate the memory of French fascist dictator Philippe Pétain, hailing him as a “great soldier” and thus whitewashing the record of Pétain’s Vichy regime and European fascism. This was the prelude to a violent repression of the “Yellow Vests,” which the pseudo-left allies of the trade unions like the NPA called a “far right rabble.”

The “Yellow Vest” movement, while it enjoyed broad popular sympathy in France, issued calls for an “apolitical” awakening of the people that did not win support from broader layers of workers. Now, a new stage in the class struggle is being prepared. The mobilization of large layers of public-sector workers underscores the need to make a political appeal to the working class as a whole, on the perspective of waging the class struggle that is erupting around the world.

Independent committees of action in workplaces, schools and working class neighborhoods are critical to allow workers to organize and map out their actions without interference from the unions and their allies. The Socialist Equality Party (PES) will seek to connect this rise of the class struggle to an internationalist, socialist and anti-war movement in the European and international working class, allowing it to take power and reorganize public life based on social need, not private profit.



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