

For collective strike action against the end of the COVID-19 lockdown!

The National Committee of the Socialist Equality Party (France)
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The Socialist Equality Party (PES, Parti de l'égalité socialiste), the French section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, calls on all nonessential workers to collectively exercise their right to strike against Macron's attempts to impose today the end of lockdown in France against the COVID-19 pandemic.

The conditions for a safe return to work are not met, though governments across Europe are ending lockdowns. While the lockdowns imposed in several European countries have cut the influx of new cases, about 20,000 new cases are still confirmed every day, including hundreds and often thousands in France. In the United States, there are 30,000 new cases every day. While lifting lockdown policies in America, the Trump administration says in its internal documents that Americans must resign themselves to 3,000 deaths a day.

The European Union's premature ending of the lockdown underscores its contempt for human life. Hundreds of thousands or even millions of lives are threatened on a European scale. Macron turns a blind eye to the epidemiological projections of his own scientific advisers: ending lockdown could increase the number of deaths in France from 25,000 to 60,000 or even 110,000 before the end of 2020.

The PES rejects the lie that society does not have enough money to shelter at home and protect itself from COVID-19 while awaiting the development of vaccines and treatments. Central banks and states are flooding the financial markets and billionaires with trillions of dollars and euros of public funds. If small businesses are threatened with bankruptcy, if workers lose their wages, and if the poor and vulnerable are hungry, it is because the ultrarich loot and gorge themselves on public wealth.

Workers do not have to die on the job to protect the banks' profits. Through generations of revolutionary struggle in the 20th century, in France specifically after the May 1968 general strike, they have established their "right to withdraw": capitalists cannot force them to work in nonessential jobs in life-threatening conditions. The exercise of this right does not lead to any loss of wages. The huge number of deaths of COVID-19 shows workers are fully justified in invoking their right to withdraw today.

However, amid a global pandemic this struggle cannot be waged within France's borders or within French labor law. The full industrial might of the international working class must be mobilized for a revolutionary political struggle, in order to expropriate the ruling class whose response to the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated its bankruptcy and illegitimacy.

This struggle is necessarily international. Given the global transmission of the virus, a premature end to the lockdown and resurgence of the virus in one country threatens workers in all countries. Exercising the right of withdrawal in France will only have the necessary effect if the workers put at the centre of their struggle a fight to mobilise the international working class against the end of the lockdown in America and across Europe and the world.

Workers will have to organise in order to exercise this right collectively, but they cannot use the trade unions for this purpose. In order to launch the struggle against Macron and other imperialist regimes, workers will have to form action committees, independent of the trade unions. Only such bodies can check workplace safety and coordinate the struggle against Macron and the financial aristocracy.

The unions and their political allies are integrated into

the campaign to end the lockdown. They negotiated with the Medef (The French Employers' Association) as it called to slash paid holidays and overtime pay. The unions indicate that they will not oppose the end of lockdown, even to save lives. Asked to say whether he was calling for the exercise of the right of withdrawal, CGT leader Philippe Martinez said, "No, no, I think I've explained it clearly. We call workers to work as long as the conditions for protection are met."

The same can be said of petty-bourgeois political parties such as Unsubmissive France (LFI, *La France insoumise*), the New Anti-Capitalist Party or Workers' Fight (*Lutte ouvrière*). "It's not a question of attacking those who govern us," said LFI leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon, whose party says, "We don't favour a direct confrontation."

Only a workers struggle independent of the unions and their pseudoleft political allies can avert disaster. The pandemic, which has now sickened at least four million people and killed more than a quarter-million worldwide, is exposing a historical crisis of capitalist society.

Since 2018, an unprecedented wave of struggles against social inequality has shaken the world. The "yellow vest" movement and the longest transport strike since 1968 in France were part of this global resurgence of the class struggle. The first wave of mass teacher and auto strikes in the US since the 1970s; the Portuguese nurses strike organized on social media; the first national strike by Polish teachers since the Stalinist restoration of capitalism in 1989; and mass protests in Algeria, Lebanon, Iraq, India, Bolivia and Chile all heralded a new era.

The epidemic has demonstrated the bankruptcy of the European Union (EU), created by the restoration of capitalism by the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe between 1989 and 1991, and the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. Health care systems bled dry by the austerity and bank bailouts adopted after the 2008 crash could not even provide enough masks for health care workers. Vast layers of the working class, nurses, agricultural workers, truck drivers, deliverymen, and cashiers, are both "essential" and paid at poverty wages.

Opposition to the end of lockdown is only a first step towards a socialist revolution that alone can give workers the political power they need to defend their interests and defend humanity against COVID-19. The

PES therefore advances the following demands:

- Access to health care and quality food for all without distinction, with special protection for the elderly, prisoners and refugees. For the regularization of all immigrants and refugees and the release of any prisoner held in unhealthy conditions.
- No jobs lost or small businesses liquidated. No wage cuts or social rights slashed during the pandemic.
- For rank-and-file committees of action, independent of the trade unions, in workplaces and working-class neighbourhoods.
- Nationalisation under workers' control of all large companies and expropriation of the large fortunes saved by EU bailouts organised after the 2008 crash or this year's pandemic.

A social order that plays with the deaths of millions of people in the interests of the financial elites is condemned. There is nothing to negotiate with Macron, the Medef or the capitalist aristocracy. The PES will fight to link opposition to the end of lockdown in France and internationally to a socialist and internationalist political movement of workers to take power and reorganize economic life on the basis of social need, not profit. This requires the overthrow of the EU and its replacement by the United Socialist States of Europe.



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