

Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo sends police against striking waste workers

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On Tuesday, several hundred Paris garbage collectors and sewage workers demonstrated against the civil service reforms due to take effect on January 1, 2022, by occupying City Hall. The Socialist Party (PS) mayor of Paris, Anne Hidalgo, and the police prefecture responded with police repression, chasing away the strikers and imposing heavy fines.

Sewage workers and garbage collectors, employed by the municipality, first demonstrated in front of City Hall, then entered the courtyard of the building. Some climbed onto the roofs of the building with smoke bombs. Several hundred remained outside. The strikers unfurled a banner on the roof that declared: “Hidalgo sacrifices the heroes.”

Told at late notice of the meeting place on Tuesday morning, street sweepers and sewage workers entered the building without hindrance at about 7 a.m., according to *Libération*. A delegation was received an hour and a half later by the secretariat of the City Hall. Following the meeting, the police intervened, surrounding the demonstrators and fining them 135 euros. The police moved against the workers, reportedly leaving three injured.

A demonstrator who preferred to remain anonymous told *20 minutes*: “When others are indoors, we are outside, whether it rains, is windy, or snows. Many colleagues have back or shoulder problems. It’s not normal.”

Others noted that they were on the front lines of the response to the coronavirus pandemic. “We were in people’s garbage cans, we didn’t even have masks,” said Jerome, a 37-year-old sewer worker.

Jerome added: “I was a sweeper for several years before becoming a sewer worker. My wife is a nurse and I can assure you that the sweepers’ shifts are worse than hers, while they are already difficult for her to

bear.” Another civil servant warned *Libération* that “this is a movement that can become more resolute if the city hall sticks to its position. We have plenty of other means of action.”

Last Wednesday and Thursday, municipal employees mobilized outside City Hall to denounce “a social cut” at the call of the Paris City Hall Civil Servants’ union. At the end of April, the national Minister for the Transformation of Public Services, Amélie de Montchalin, wrote by letter to reject Anne Hidalgo’s request for an additional period before the implementation of the reform, asking her to respect the date of January 1, 2022.

According to information from *Le Monde*, negotiations are underway between the unions and the Paris City Council, which are seeking to find a compromise. The unions have called for another demonstration today.

As the worker Jerome noted, public employees have played a major role in maintaining the infrastructure and in caring for the sick, which exposes them to the deadly danger of the virus. There is a gulf between the support of the public for public workers and the fraudulent applause offered by the government and political establishment, which has led a full-scale attack on their social gains for decades.

The reform of the public service is a broader attack on the social gains and democratic rights obtained by the working class after the Second World War, such as the status of civil servants. It would mean a reduction of 8 days of annual leave per year for city garbage workers.

The local city councils would have one year after their reelection to implement or renegotiate this change.

The reform also provides for the extension of the use of contractual workers and infringes upon the right of

workers to strike. It includes a mandatory minimum service in order to guarantee the continuity of public service. Advance notice must be given within 48 hours of the start of any strike, a period that must include at least one working day.

Finally, it increases the effective retirement age, which is the main reason for the anger of the Paris garbage collectors who demonstrated in front of the city hall.

The civil servants whose job presents a risk or generates high levels of fatigue belong to the so-called “active category.” This classification allows them to retire earlier. Depending on the job they do, they can retire at 52 or 57. With this reform, only police officers, gendarmes and prison guards would remain in the “active category.” For others workers, membership of this category would be replaced by the opening of a so-called professional personal account, which permits retirement at 60.

Faced with the excessive repression of strikes by Hidalgo and Macron, it is essential to mobilize more broadly the working class impacted by decades of austerity and rising inequality, now exacerbated by the impact of the pandemic.

One year after the start of the global pandemic, social anger is rising among young people and workers against the policy of “herd immunity” that has been pursued by governments across Europe. This has caused several million deaths worldwide, and more than 100,000 in France. The World Health Organization itself has noted that these deaths were largely preventable.

However, public service workers can expect nothing from the unions. The reform law was voted in in 2019, but has not led to any call for even limited mobilization by the unions, who negotiated the reform with Macron. The unions are incapable of fighting seriously against this reform, but are seeking to keep control of the anger of workers.

The trade union apparatuses backed the EU stimulus package that has provided hundreds of thousands of euros in public money to restructure the French and European economy. Vast sums are flowing into the local labour councils, and from there to the leadership of the trade union apparatuses. A struggle for the defense of the social gains of the civil servants and more widely of the working class requires a political

struggle against the authoritarian and criminal policy of Macron and the European Union. For this the workers must break with the trade unions and their political allies.

The Socialist Equality Party encourages workers in struggle in France to join the International Workers’ Alliance of Rank-and-file Committees launched by the International Committee of the Fourth International in order to unify workers’ struggles in France and throughout the world.



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