

French unions call token public strikes in railway and airports

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The French trade unions called a one-day strike among some railway workers yesterday and the first day of a five-day strike by staff at both Charles de Gaulle and Orly airports in Paris.

Unions did not release a statement on the number of workers participating in the strike action at the Paris airports. At 11:00 a.m., the general secretary of the National Union of Autonomous Trade Unions' (UNSA) Paris airport branch, Laurent Gassine, tweeted that 30 percent of flights at the Orly Airport had been delayed by between 15 minutes and one hour. The news agency AFP reported that flights were largely operating normally. The Paris airports stated that they expected some delays on flights until Monday due to the strike.

In the railways, the one-day strike called by the General Federation of Labor (Confédération générale du travail, CGT) yesterday impacted TER regional express trains nationally. It did not impact high-speed TGV or metro lines. TER services were disrupted in Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, Pays de la Loire, Brittany, the East, New Aquitaine and Occitania.

Also yesterday, the unions announced they were cancelling their former strike authorization notices for the weekend of July 3-4 on national Ouigo train networks.

Participation in these strikes was low, despite mounting opposition among workers against the offensive underway by the employers. The actions announced Thursday were token events with which workers in France are all too familiar. Announced without any clear demands or any attempt to mobilize broader support in the working class, they aim only to let off steam among the workers and demoralize them, while the union bureaucracies work out a deal with management.

Airline workers face a major cost-cutting plan by

Paris Airports (ADP Group), which includes Charles de Gaulle, Orly and Le Bourget airports. The ADP Group, which employs over 5,000 workers, is negotiating with the unions a Plan for Adjustment of Labor Contracts that eliminates numerous employee bonuses. According to the unions, these would amount to a paycut of up to 20 percent, while the company itself admits that it would mean a paycut of between 4-8 percent. Workers refusing to sign the new contract under these terms would be laid off.

A one-day protest action called by the unions on June 18 outside the ADP Group headquarters involved some 700 people, including operations workers. "The management is psychologically and financially exhausting us," Ramesh Monsard, 44, who has worked for 20 years as a parking site manager at ADP, told *Le Monde*.

The unions do not oppose the company's restructuring plans. Only seven months ago, they signed an agreement with ADP for a "voluntary" redundancy plan that led to the wiping out of 1,250 jobs, one-sixth of the entire workforce.

At the time, the unions justified this action by claiming that it would reduce the company's demands for further attacks. ADP management released a statement noting that it would offer an opportunity to collaborate even more closely with the unions. "In order to give a new chance for social dialogue and to avoid enforced redundancies ... the direction preferred to propose a new plan" for redundancies, it said.

In the railway sector, the CGT statement announcing yesterday's token strike included no concrete demands, calling for "real negotiations for a high-quality social statute" and an "end to restructuring." It made not even a token reference to the imposition of the restructuring tied to President Emmanuel Macron's 2018 railway

reform. While there is enormous opposition to the reform among workers, Macron negotiated it in close collaboration with the trade unions.

Under the new law, more than 23,000 workers are no longer being hired under the old railway workers statute, which entails a major cut to their wages and working conditions. The reform initiated the complete privatization of the SNCF national rail network, which was nationalized after World War II.

In 2018, SNCF workers conducted a bitter strike against Macron's railway reform. The CGT and other unions isolated the strike, refusing to mobilize any broader actions by workers against the privatization and instead maintained a series of demoralizing, intermittent work stoppages over months that were aimed at demoralizing the workers. The unions, which had already negotiated the bill with Macron over months, worked to betray the strike and impose Macron's reform.

The unions have collaborated with the government throughout the coronavirus pandemic to impose Macron's policy of "herd immunity," opposing any strike action to close nonessential production that would prevent the spread of the virus but impact upon corporate profits. The result of these policies across the EU has been the deaths of more than 110,000 people in France and over 1.1 million on the continent. The wealth of Europe's 684 billionaires has soared by more than \$1 trillion to \$3 trillion over the same period.

The Macron government and unions are aware that this has only deepened the opposition among railway workers to the policy of the ruling class. While trillions of euros have been handed to the major banks and corporations in the form of EU stimulus packages, the funding for these measures is to be extracted through a stepped-up offensive on the social entitlements of the working class.

For a struggle to be organized, however, it must be waged outside of the control of the pro-corporate trade union apparatuses. Railway and public transport workers should form their own action committees, independent of the unions, to organize a struggle and appeal to workers across France and Europe. These must be oriented toward a new political perspective, based on the fight for workers' governments, the transformation of the major corporations into public utilities democratically controlled by the working

population, and the socialist reorganization of the economy according to social need, not private profit.



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