

French CGT union backs NATO imperialism in Russian-Ukrainian war

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The declaration by the French trade union, Confédération générale du travail (CGT), on the Russian-Ukrainian war poses essential questions for workers in France and internationally. It confirms the unlimited support of union bureaucracies for the political and military operations of imperialism, which threaten to unleash a world war with Russia. Waging the necessarily international struggle against war, in France and elsewhere, requires mobilizing workers independently of the trade unions.

“The risk of unleashing a world war is real,” the CGT admits. However, it makes no call to mobilize workers and organize strikes against the risk of a nuclear war. Rather, it welcomes the operations of Ukrainian nationalist militias and military units armed by NATO and calls for a pro-NATO regime change in Russia itself.

“The main hope resides therefore in the resistance of the Ukrainian population and in the aspiration for change of the Russian and Belarus peoples,” the CGT declares. Then denouncing Russian President Vladimir Putin, “The CGT’s condemnation must above all strike at the aggressor, that is to say, Vladimir Putin.”

The Parti de l’égalité socialiste (Socialist Equality Party, PES) opposes the war launched by Putin in Ukraine, which divides Russian and Ukrainian workers and has killed thousands. But the PES rejects all attempts to lay the blame on one or another capitalist regime for risking the danger of world war. As with the two world wars of the 20th century, the capitalist nation-state system as a whole is responsible and must be overthrown. In this struggle, the imperialist powers and NATO are the most brutal enemies of the international working class.

The CGT, for its part, aims to block the mobilization of workers in such a struggle in France, and therefore the international unity of workers against war. The CGT proposes to mobilize not the workers against war, but the banks and media of Europe against Russia.

It proposes a “trade union convoy for Ukraine” to help Ukrainian soldiers and nationalist militias, already armed by NATO to the tune of billions of dollars. While admitting the devastating effects of sanctions on the economy and therefore workers, the CGT applauds the attempts by US and European banks to strangle Russia:

The possible effects of preventing Russian banks access to the international banking system of transactions (called SWIFT) can provoke a total destabilization of the Russian economy with vast consequences for the population and world economy. The question of intensifying the economic sanctions is therefore posed and several voices in Russia lead us to understand that this is a path worth consideration.

The CGT calls for trade and financial sanctions against Russia, aware of their “serious consequences” for workers worldwide. That is, the embargo NATO is imposing on Russian oil, gas and wheat is driving up prices of

fuel, heating and food, devastating workers’ living standards around the world.

This violently anti-working class and anti-Russian policy of the CGT is all the more striking given that it previously expressed a certain opposition to the neo-Nazi Ukrainians. Since the end of World War II, the CGT was closely tied to the counterrevolutionary Stalinist bureaucracy in Moscow. These ties survived the Stalinist bureaucracy’s dissolution of the USSR in 1991 and its restoration of capitalism across Eastern Europe.

In 2014, the CGT, which still cultivated ties with the Russian post-Stalinist capitalist regime, sent two railworkers’ union officials, Axel Persson and Mathieu Boll-Reddat, on a visit to the pro-Russian separatist zones of Ukraine. Speaking in the separatist zone of Luhansk on the 70th anniversary of the insurrectional strike of Parisian rail workers on August 10, 1944 against the Nazi occupation, Bolle-Reddat said:

Our trade union fought against the Nazis, which is why we are here, with the workers in the Donbas who are fighting the fascists who have taken control of the Ukraine government. ... I am not here as a tourist. My union is witnessing what happens here, and we will put pressure on the French government.

The CGT, which disavowed Persson and Boll-Reddat at the time, is now swinging to open support for Ukrainian neo-Nazis, President Macron and NATO. It ignores the impact of inflation on workers’ living standards, or the danger of a nuclear world war, which it admits is real. This reckless and reactionary policy reflects the class character of the CGT and, more broadly, of what the bourgeois press falsely calls “the workers movement.”

The CGT does not represent workers, but the privileged, pro-imperialist layers of the middle class who make up the trade union bureaucracy. Since the Stalinist dissolution of the USSR in 1991, they have evolved sharply to the right. With the collapse of their working class base, the French trade unions have relied almost exclusively on financing from employers and the state, while individual union officials’ wealth has been tied more and more to the rise of global financial markets.

The CGT covers up NATO’s alliance with Ukrainian neo-fascism

In the 30 years since the dissolution of the USSR, the CGT bureaucracy has completed its alignment with imperialism. It is impossible not to recognize in its declaration the echo of the geo-political ambitions of the strategists and propagandists of US imperialism. Denouncing the main countries targeted by the Pentagon, namely Russia and China, the CGT

claims that a NATO overthrow of Putin will magically restore peace:

The return to peace passes through the fall of Putin. His victory would be catastrophic. If it were endorsed by a peace agreement founded on a partition of Ukraine, the aggressor would be rewarded for its belligerent and imperialist policy. ... And what would be the example set for other major powers, notably China whose claims on Taiwan are common knowledge! A draw or even a Russian defeat without the departure of Putin would allow the threat of a renewed war to linger on.

To claim that Russia is the main obstacle to peace is to whitewash the crimes of imperialism. The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 removed the military obstacle to a neo-colonial offensive by the imperialist powers. NATO could carry out a series of bloody wars, often targeting countries allied to the ex-USSR. Millions of people died and tens of millions had to flee their homes in Iraq, Somalia, Yugoslavia, Libya, Syria and Mali.

The overthrow of Putin by NATO would not bring about peace but the crushing of Russia, the installation of a neo-colonial collaborationist regime in Moscow and the intensification of imperialist wars and plunder of Eurasia.

The CGT insists that Moscow is totally responsible for the war, equating Putin with Hitler. It identifies Putin's Russian policy in Ukraine with the Nazi annexation of the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia in 1938, approved by prime ministers Neville Chamberlain of Britain and Edouard Daladier of France at the 1938 Munich summit. It thus creates a monstrous amalgam between opposition to a world war launched against Russia and the policy of figures implicated in collaboration with Hitler. The CGT writes:

Is Putin solely responsible for this situation? He is absolutely and nearly totally. This war was his decision. He has fixed the scope and the duration. He has dreamt of it for years and if the West is responsible, it is first and foremost for having let him annex Crimea in 2014, accepting de facto this situation over time, including on the geo-political level. His annexation of the Sudetenland could to his mind only confirm the feasibility of his dream of annexation pure and simple.

That is just a falsification aimed at hiding the CGT's alignment with the imperialist powers chiefly responsible for the conflict. Looking to posture as anti-imperialist, the CGT mildly criticizes NATO. On NATO's expansion into Eastern Europe after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, despite NATO promises to Moscow to the contrary, the CGT admits that Russian leaders "legitimately considered that the gesticulations and belly dancing of NATO were a violation of the 1991 agreements."

The CGT does not deny either that the Ukrainian neo-fascists are fighting Russia and have been since the coming to power of the current regime through a putsch in February 2014 in Kiev. It even admits the decisive role played by neo-Nazism in the putsch that followed the Maidan protests:

There is the unmistakable fact that in 2014, during the Maidan protests which led to the fall of Yanukovitch, the taking of Crimea and the war in the Donbas (nearly 14,000 dead of which 3,000 were civilians), many extreme right-wing groups occupied the

streets, terrorizing and weighing heavily on Poroshenko and his administration. Several ministers from the extreme right even entered his government.

However, the CGT keeps silent on the fact that this revolt was approved and directed by the NATO powers. US, German and French diplomats went to Kiev in 2014 to encourage protests and then applaud the right-wing regime installed by the putsch, led by the neo-Nazi Right Sector militia. The installation of anti-Russian, anti-Semitic forces at the heart of the Ukrainian regime provoked a civil war with the Russian-speaking regions of the country.

If in 2014 layers of the CGT in 2014 were troubled by this far-right policy, the CGT has since adopted it. Indeed, the putsch in Kiev was part of a NATO and French neo-colonial strategy openly supported by French trade unions.

The conflict between Kiev and Moscow over Crimea, which voted for its integration into Russia after the Kiev putsch, is linked to NATO's neo-colonial war in Syria since 2011. In September 2013, Russian ships based in Sebastopol in Crimea protected the Syrian coast from military strikes that US and French ships intended to carry out. Washington, Paris, Berlin and other NATO powers then supported a neo-fascist putsch to install a regime which unsuccessfully tried to conquer Crimea and Sebastopol.

This conflict in Ukraine has been ongoing since 2014, with a few truces, like the war in Syria that pits NATO on one side against Russia and Iran on the other. The arming of Ukraine by NATO against Russia during this conflict corresponds to US imperialism's world strategy. Indeed, in 2017, Washington declared in its National Security Strategy that "China and Russia threatened America's power" and that it had to confront these countries, considered as "hostile rivals."

The CGT's pro-NATO position on Ukraine flows from its support for French imperialism's neo-colonial war policy of in Syria. Already in 2012, the CGT national executive published a declaration, "Stop the massacres in Syria," whitewashing the role of Islamist "rebel" militias backed by NATO and demanding an imperialist intervention. Denouncing only the Syrian regime and demanding sanctions against it, the CGT wrote:

The French trade unions CFTD, CGT, UNSA, FSU and Solidaires salute the incredible courage of the Syrian people who rose up peacefully against the despotic family power of the corrupt Assad family. ... Syria can no longer be isolated nor the regime allowed to impose its terror. It is only a question of time. But how many lives must be sacrificed before the international community condemns this bloody regime and imposes sanctions against it and its leaders?

Having backed France and NATO's intervention in the Syrian conflict, the CGT bureaucracy is again aligning itself with NATO and the Ukrainian far right in the Russian-Ukrainian war. NATO's argument that it is defending the weaker party struggling for liberation from Russia's overwhelming power is refuted by the course of the war. Armed to the teeth with billions of euros in weapons from NATO, the militias and the Ukrainian armed forces are the spearhead of a NATO war against Russia.

The balance of forces in the war launched by NATO against Russia on Ukrainian soil is not in Russia's favor. NATO has a population of roughly 900 million inhabitants of which 3.3 million are in arms, compared to 144 million Russians with an army of 1 million. The GDP of NATO is about \$40 trillion, or about 20 times that of Russia. It is the US and European banks which are stealing Russia's export revenues, not the reverse.

Build independent, international workers organizations of struggle

A struggle cannot be waged against capitalism's drive to war and authoritarian rule without an international mobilization of the working class in a struggle for socialism. The CGT is working to block the emergence of such a movement. It tries to pass off its pro-imperialist politics as socialist, employing a few hollow references to communism:

Our pacifism, flowing from the Zimmerwald conference of 1915, updated by the rejection of "campism," means a rejection of the game of alliances which drives peoples into world conflicts in the interests of the bourgeoisie or the aristocrats which govern them.

This historic reference is cynical and false. The international conference at Zimmerwald brought together Lenin, Trotsky and other worker opponents of the First World War. Two years later, in October 1917, Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks led the working class in the overthrow of Russian capitalism and the foundation of a workers' state based on the soviets, the workers councils. The upsurge of the international class struggle this triggered brought the First World War to an end and led to the construction of the Communist International.

Is it really necessary to show that the CGT's strategy is diametrically opposed to that of the Bolsheviks and Trotsky? The CGT apparatus, which approved of the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union, now backs the war aims of the imperialist powers. It aligns itself with the attempt to use the Ukrainian far right against Russia, ignoring the danger of world war.

The class gulf separating the working class from the nationalist CGT bureaucracy is that between revolution and counterrevolution. The CGT apparatus tells its supporters to put "pressure" on the state for a policy more favorable to workers within the borders of France. But the major problems of this epoch are international—war, pandemic, the diktat of world financial markets over social life—and on them, the CGT bureaucracy has no progressive policy to offer.

It was openly hostile to a major mobilization for social equality which brought together large numbers of workers in France, the "Yellow Vest" movement in 2018-2019 organized via social media. CGT leader Philippe Martinez called them "bad company" and blocked a truckers strike in their support. He lined up with the petty-bourgeois propaganda of the Pabloite New Anticapitalist Party, which denounced the "yellow vests" as neo-fascists:

Like the CGT and Solidarity trade unions, we will not mix our anger on Saturday, November 17, with the bosses' maneuvers exploited by the far right, which is not a temporary ally but a mortal enemy. Yes, everything is going up except wages, and the lower classes are right to have had enough with price rises for fuel. ... But we cannot say it on Saturday, November 17, in actions or supposedly citizens' gatherings that look like far-right mobs, in which we would line up with the deadliest enemies of the workers' movement.

The Russo-Ukrainian war confirms that it was not the "Yellow Vests" but the petty-bourgeois apparatus of the CGT that aligned itself with

imperialism against the workers. Currently, the CGT's anti-worker policy is worked out in a de facto alliance with Ukrainian neo-Nazis.

On the COVID-19 pandemic, the CGT aligned itself with the policy of mass infection dictated by the European Union and the banks. In June 2020, the CGT signaled its support for EU bailouts handing trillions of euros to the banks and major corporations and for a European military build-up. However, these bailouts were predicated on a rejection of any Zero COVID strategy or any serious attempt to halt the contagion.

The CGT bureaucracy effectively approved a reactionary public health policy that has cost over 1.7 million lives in Europe, including over 140,000 in France. Today, tens of thousands of French people are infected daily by a virus whose long-term consequences are unknown.

These positions justify the historic struggle of the Trotskyist movement, the International Committee of the Fourth International and its French section, the Parti de l'égalité socialiste (PES), to break the diktat of the union bureaucracy over the working class. To fight the pandemic, the banks and the danger of war, it is necessary to mobilize and unite workers in struggle internationally. This requires breaking the reactionary influence of the national trade union bureaucracies, which are consciously hostile to the traditions of October 1917.

Against the war in Ukraine and the Stalinist CGT, the PES calls for the building of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) and the international unity of workers based on the program of world socialist revolution.



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