

French workers on one-day strike 29 September against inflation, war

Our reporters
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Around 250,000 workers marched in France at the call of national unions in a day of mobilization on wages, amidst mounting anger over the danger of hunger and cold this winter, caused by the NATO war against Russia.

The day of action is part of an international workers' mobilization driven by inflation, the energy crisis, and the danger of a full-scale war between NATO and Russia. A wave of strikes is sweeping Britain, where dockers, teachers and postal workers are on strike. In Spain and Turkey, care workers and industrial workers are on strike. In France, several refineries are at a standstill and wildcat strikes rocked Stellantis in Hordain.

As workers fear a huge rise in food and heating prices this winter, and Macron discusses a new reform to slash pensions, an international explosion of class struggle is being prepared.

Members of the *Parti de l'égalité socialiste* (PES) intervened in the demonstration in Paris, calling for the mobilization of workers internationally against inflation and war by building rank-and-file committees among workers independent of the union apparatus. They stressed the need to organize independently of and against trade union leaderships and pseudo-left parties that support the war in Ukraine and negotiate their policies with capitalist governments.

Striking workers expressed their anger at the drastic decline in purchasing power and working conditions, and at the imperialist policies of Macron.

Gilbert, who has worked in a post office in the Paris region for 22 years, said: "Twenty years ago, working conditions were good. Now we have nothing. There are far fewer workers, and they are using more and more temps. At the Post Office, half of the workers are temporary agency workers. They work for a while and

then they disappear, and we see new temps coming in. We have to keep training them and that takes a lot of time, energy and stress."

Gilbert also denounced the fact that "temps and workers don't get the same pay. I am against wage discrimination."

Gilbert, who was demonstrating with his wife to demand a pay rise and oppose Macron's pension reform, said, "We received a 1.5 percent increase from October 1, which is barely enough to live on. They talk to us about a 1.5 percent increase but that means that someone earning 2,000 euros gross per month will earn 30 euros more. We can't do anything with that. We would need a pay rise of at least 300 euros to be able to live better."

Gilbert stressed his solidarity with workers internationally: "I want to say that I fully support the struggle of my colleagues all over the world. In Europe and all other countries, they are privatizing the post office. In France, they are also privatizing the postal service. We are fighting against privatization in all countries."

He also expressed his hope that workers in NATO countries and Russia would mobilize internationally against the war: "In my opinion, what Europe and NATO are doing is unforgivable. Putin cannot be allowed to do the same. ... I agree that this war is a global problem. I am opposed to it because it will create the worst destruction for humanity and the economy."

Gilbert also stressed the refusal of the trade union bureaucracies and their political allies, such as Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Unsubmissive France, to mobilize working class opposition to this war. "I am a member of a trade union. Neither the unions nor the left-wing parties in France have organized a single demonstration

against the war,” he said. He said he agreed with the PES proposal to build an International Workers’ Alliance of base committees.

“I agree we need a new rank-and-file organization to defend us,” he said. “The government is attacking our pensions; it’s how they hope to profit from the war. Macron is talking about retirement at 64 or even 67, it’s unacceptable.”

Adélaïde, a social worker in the education sector, spoke of her anger at the long years of wage freezes which, even before the current wave of inflation, had undermined purchasing power.

She said, “Now they’ve finally given us a raise, but it’s been 10 years since wages were raised, so our purchasing power is ruined. Parisian social workers can’t afford to live on their salaries. It’s still amazing, with the training we have, with the importance we have, with a minister who keeps saying that we have to protect children, that we have to listen to them, accompany them. But [with such low wages,] how can we hire colleagues? In our department, there are 15 jobs that we cannot fill.”

With a monthly salary of 1,500 euros, she added, “salaries should have kept up with inflation. But inflation has gone up, when you go shopping now you realize that it has gone up a lot... My shopping trolley costs me 50 percent more than before.”

In the 40 years since François Mitterrand and the Socialist Party came to power in 1981, Adélaïde said, “there have been huge increases in productivity, but it’s not going into workers’ pockets.”

Adélaïde also stressed her anger at conditions faced by refugees in France, who live on inadequate social support. She said, “Our policy towards foreigners is crazy. ... I don’t think it helps to have an even stricter policy, to have police prefectures that don’t give any appointments for them to apply [for support]. It’s contrary to the possibility of liberating oneself.”

Jean, a CGT railway worker who hasn’t received a raise in eight years, told WSWs of his anger at the break-up of rail workers’ wage protections mandated by the 2018 rail reform: “I’ve been working at the SNCF for 18 years and my salary is around 1,700 euros. They broke our pay scale; it happened in July. We must do something about it, because there are a lot of resignations as a result, many people who were there for 15 years or more saw better things elsewhere and

moved on.”

He stressed his disgust at the war between NATO and Russia in Ukraine: “I find it scandalous that we find billions to finance arms which divide and harm people, when we could use these billions for something else... How did we get to this war? I think it’s because of the big corporations that have decided to reshape society. Does it have to come to that?”



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