

French government threatens to requisition striking refinery workers at Total

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The strike in French refineries to demand higher wages in the face of inflation is defying official threats and the union bureaucracies' attempt to isolate the movement. The powerful strike is causing major fuel shortages across France, with nearly a third of French gas stations struggling. Yesterday, 27.3 per cent of service stations were facing a shortage situation on at least one product, according to the energy ministry.

On Wednesday, after the signing of an agreement at Exxon with the pro-Macron French Democratic Labor Confederation (CFDT) union, the government had decided on a first requisition of strikers to break the blockage of the fuel depot at the ExxonMobil refinery in Port-Jérôme-sur-Seine. Six employees of the Total fuel depot in Mardyck were also requisitioned. Now, the State is preparing this same strategy against Total workers, with the complicity of the union bureaucracies.

On Friday the CFDT signed a wage agreement with Total management, providing for a 7 percent increase over 2023 retroactive to 1 November 2022. This is well below the expected inflation of 10 to 15 per cent or more per year and thus imposes a large cut to real wages.

After the agreement was signed, the CFDT called an end to the strike. CFDT official Geoffrey Caillon stated that for his union, "validating this agreement is also asking everyone to calm down." Total management declared that it was a "majority" agreement that should mark the "end of the strike on all its sites."

Despite the signing of an agreement by the two unions, the strike was renewed Friday in Total refineries and oil depots, including Gonfreville-l'Orcher, Donges, Feyzin, Grandpuits and Flandres.

Aurore Bergé, the leader Macron's Renaissance party bloc in the National Assembly, said that additional

requisitions "could take place" if "the blockades are not lifted" in the refineries.

So far, the Stalinist General Confederation of Labor (CGT) union has refrained from signing any agreement with the oil giants, fearing that the workers would then disavow the deal and emerge in open rebellion against the union bureaucracies and the state.

Shortly after CGT leader Philippe Martinez called for negotiations on Thursday evening, its negotiators left the meeting on Friday morning, criticizing the agreement. "The proposals on the table are largely insufficient," said Alexis Antonioli, CGT general secretary of the union's platform at TotalEnergies in Normandy. About the other unions, he said: "These unions who would come to sign a cheap agreement, it will not change anything to the mobilization, it will not change anything to the state of mind and the determination of the strikers."

A mass movement is brewing among workers worried about inflation, rising energy prices this winter, and the war in Ukraine. Strikes have been called among transport and energy workers for next week, and the CGT has called a one-day protest on October 18 for higher wages and opposing pension cuts.

The ruling class is terrified of the danger of an uncontrollable eruption of protests against inflation and war. On Thursday, the daily *Le Parisien* reported: "the mobilization is spreading and is worrying the police authorities. While a strike movement is already paralyzing several French refineries and nuclear power plants, workers in other industrial sectors are calling to swell the ranks of the protest."

Le Parisien reported that "the strike is under surveillance," citing a note from French domestic intelligence that warned of the danger of a "contagion" of the strike to other strategic sectors of the French

economy.

In this context, workers cannot rely on the trade union bureaucracy to organize their struggle against the policy of inflation and war conducted by the capitalist states and the banks in France and across Europe. Indeed, a major reason why the union bureaucracies are not mobilizing workers more widely against inflation and war is because they themselves approve of most of Macron's policies.

The Total wage agreement shows that the CFTD bureaucracy is complicit with management in attacking workers. On the other hand, the CGT, despite its posturing as an opponent of the agreement, simply plays a different role within the same political establishment that unites the state, the employers' federations and the union bureaucracies. While the CFTD directly provides a pretext for the state to repress strikers, the CGT puts workers to sleep and demobilizes them by continuing the charade of a negotiation with a government determined to break strikes.

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, it indicated its support for EU bailouts, which give trillions of euros to banks and big business, while strengthening the European army. It issued a statement supporting NATO's war against Russia in Ukraine.

While issuing some criticism of Macron, the CGT bureaucracy is blowing hot and cold on actions that could provoke, even inadvertently, a full-scale eruption of the working class in open struggle against Macron.

On the one hand, to avoid a revolt of the rank and file, it organizes actions in a scattered order and publicly criticizes the government. After the announcement of new strikes in several nuclear power plants called by the CGT and Force Ouvrière (FO), the CGT transport federation is calling for a strike at the SNCF and RATP next Tuesday. "The question of strike action must be discussed in all companies" because "the social anger being expressed in the country is legitimate," Martinez said in an interview with the Stalinist daily *L'Humanité* on Friday.

While criticizing the requisitions ordered by Macron, the CGT decided to organize a day of inter-professional "mobilization and strike" on Tuesday 18 October.

But at the same time, the CGT announced that it would refuse to take part in the demonstration

organized by Jean-Luc Mélenchon and the France insoumise (LFI) today against the high cost of living. There is no need to be a supporter of Mélenchon, who has repeatedly declared his willingness to be Macron's prime minister, to see that the arguments of the CGT bureaucracy to justify its refusal to mobilize were absurd and reactionary.

Martinez told France Info that the fight against high living costs and climate inaction has nothing to do with the fight he claimed the CGT supports, "for higher wages." What a fraud! It is plainly apparent that if costs of living are high, this is because wages are too low and need to be increased.

The decisive question for the working class is to organize independently of the union bureaucracies, in rank-and-file committees. Only such organizations can unify struggles, mobilize workers for a continuing, long-term struggle, and, above all, link together the ever-widening layers of workers internationally who are entering the struggle against inflation and war.

The French refinery strikes are taking place amidst a growing explosion of class struggles driven by inflation and the NATO-Russia war in Ukraine. Port and transport workers are struggling in Britain and South Africa, air traffic controllers across Africa, teachers across Europe from Germany and Norway to Serbia, Kosovo and Greece. In the US, workers' anger is rising in the auto and rail industries, and the possibility of a national rail strike is looming.

The urgent task is to organize a rank-and-file insurrection against the demobilizing and nationalist influence that the union bureaucracies exert on workers' struggles. Only rank-and-file committees can to structure and lead such a revolt, in France and internationally. This is the perspective on which the *Parti de l'égalité socialiste* fights and invites workers to support and join the PES.



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