

# Mobilize the working class against the requisition of French refinery workers!

Alex Lantier

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*A French version of this leaflet was distributed in Paris by members of the Parti de l'égalité socialiste at the march against high living costs and ecological inaction called on October 16 in Paris.*

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The strike of French refineries and Macron's requisitioning of strikers to force them back to work mark a new stage in the class struggle, as workers enter into open struggle against inflation. The repression they face raises vital questions for workers across France and internationally.

The working class everywhere is being impoverished by the surge in prices, combined with the impact of the war between NATO and Russia in Ukraine. Workers at Exxon and Total refineries in France have taken up the struggle against the efforts of employers and the state to impose wage increases well below inflation, which is now at historic highs. This policy, pursued not only in France but across Europe and the world, threatens to plunge masses of workers into misery.

An international mobilization of the working class is already underway. Port and transport workers are in struggle 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, anger among workers in the auto and rail industries is also increasing, and the possibility of an unprecedented national rail strike is looming.

Macron's requisition of strikers aims not to help French motorists by ensuring the availability of fuel, but to break a strike that threatens to trigger a massive eruption of the class struggle in Europe. Inflation is creating an irrepressible conflict between the workers on one hand, and all the old political and trade union structures of the established order on the other. Workers refuse to sacrifice their meager wages and

their lives to the diktat of the banks and the whims of NATO generals who advocate all-out war on Russia.

Workers in every industry have a vital interest in the struggle of the French refineries. The refinery strikers are not only mobilizing in defense of their own wages, however necessary this is. They are also defending the right of the entire working class to strike against the reactionary policies of the banks and the military high commands.

To defend the wages and rights of the refinery strikers, a new political strategy is needed. It is crucial to stop the spiral of military escalation supported by the entire European bourgeoisie in the NATO-Russia war, which not only threatens the world with nuclear war, but is promoting an explosion of energy and food prices.

This requires an international insurrection of the workers against the diktat of the union bureaucracies and their policy of "social dialogue" with the ruling class. Macron's repression of Exxon and Total strikers highlights the corrupt role of the union bureaucracies, whose funding by employers and the state is an open secret in French and European political life.

On Tuesday, a sweetheart deal negotiated by rogue French Democratic Confederation of Labor (CFDT) bureaucrats, served as a pretext for Macron to declare the strike over. The agreement of a 5.5 percent wage increase is a *de facto* pay cut for Total and Exxon workers as inflation reaches 7 to 10 percent. After the CFDT had done the deal, Macron requisitioned strikers, forcing them back to work with the threat of financial ruin or prison.

This strategy, which can be extended to other sectors of the economy, reveals how the capitalist state hopes to break all strikes with the complicity of the union bureaucracy.

The Stalinist General Confederation of Labour (CGT) has criticized CFDT accords at Exxon and Total and threatened to organize strikes in some other sectors. At the same time, however, its leader Philippe Martinez is calling for negotiations with Macron, and its federations in the ports and energy are doing the bare minimum to organize a fightback.

Martinez justified his decision to refuse support for the march against the high cost of living called by Unsubmissive France leader Jean Luc Mélenchon Sunday in Paris, on the absurd pretext that the struggle against the high cost of living is separate from the struggle he would lead to increase wages.

In fact, the CGT confederations are putting the brakes on the rank-and-file movement because the bureaucrats who run them largely support Macron's and NATO's policies that push up prices.

In June 2020, the CGT leaders signed the European pandemic bailouts, which gave trillions of euros in public funds to the banks. A crucial part of this agreement was forcing workers back to work and children back to school before the virus was eliminated; the disastrous handling of the pandemic by European governments since has killed almost 2 million people in Europe to date. Meanwhile the bailout led to a massive transfer of wealth to the financial aristocracy and an explosion in inflation, both of which continue to this day.

In March 2022, as the NATO-Russia war began in Ukraine, the CGT leadership issued a statement that aligned itself with Macron's policies. Denouncing "the aggressor, in this case Vladimir Putin," it called for sanctions to "bring about a total destabilization of the Russian economy with serious consequences for the population and for the world economy. The question of intensifying economic sanctions therefore arises and several voices in Russia suggest that this avenue should be explored."

Since then, NATO-led military escalation has plunged Europe into the initial stages of World War III. Last week, US president Joe Biden told a meeting of campaign donors that the danger of "nuclear Armageddon" is real. Thursday, in a TV appearance after Biden's comments, Macron admitted that he feared that sending artillery and missiles to Ukraine against Russia would make France a target for Russian forces. He also claimed, absurdly, that there was no

connection between the war in Ukraine and the struggle in the refineries.

In reality, workers' struggle against inflation is inseparable from the struggle against imperialist war on Russia. EU sanctions against Russia have led to massive financial speculation, causing gas and grain prices to soar. Already this policy has impoverished workers through inflation, while also producing super-profits for Total and Exxon.

This winter, European workers face gas and electricity shortages, which will devastate the economy and workers' health amid a continuing COVID-19 pandemic.

The only way to defend the refinery workers, who are at the forefront of the struggle in France against the reactionary policies of NATO imperialism, is to organize a wider mobilization of the working class. This signifies an insurrection of the rank-and-file against the nationalist, pro-imperialist orientation of the union bureaucracies and their allies in the political establishment.

The *Parti de l'égalité socialiste* (PES) calls for the formation of rank-and-file committees in workplaces, schools and working-class districts. Only such organizations, free from the influence of the trade union bureaucracies and the political establishment, can federate the struggles already taking place around the world into a powerful workers' movement against war, poverty and capitalism. The PES fights for the perspective to build the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, and invites workers on this basis to support and join it.



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