

At Paris march, French workers and youth denounce inflation, war

Our reporters
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As President Emmanuel Macron requisitions strikers to try to break a refinery strike, deep social anger is brewing among workers and youth in France. The march against high cost of living held on October 16 in Paris, called by the New popular, ecological and social union (Nupes) led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon, gathered 140,000 people, according to organizers, and 30,000 according to police.

WSWS reporters attended the march to distributing leaflets and interview demonstrators on the march.

The march was above all characterized by a deep class gulf that ran through it. On the one hand, the Nupes is a political coalition closely linked to Macron and the current government. It includes not only Mélenchon's Unsubmissive France (LFI) party, but also President François Hollande's big-business Socialist Party (PS). During Hollande's term, the PS not only waged war in Syria and Mali but rammed through deep attacks, like the labor law, that led up to Macron's election.

As if to make these links explicit, Mélenchon gave an interview to *Ouest France* the day before the march, to again insist that he is ready to serve as Macron's prime minister. He declared that "we must escape the current mess" and, asked whether he was still looking to become prime minister under Macron, replied: "I'm at the top of the list, yes, at least if it's in the next six months."

On the other hand, deep opposition to inflation and war drove tens of thousands of workers and youth who attended the march. This development underscores the need for a political break with the Nupes and all the pro-capitalist union bureaucracies affiliated to it who are seeking to cut deals with Macron.

Kamal, who works in a logistics company in Strasbourg, had come to Paris to protest "Macron's

policies, the policies of the rich, I've had enough." He stressed his opposition to Macron's proposed pension cut, raising the retirement age to 65 with a mandatory pay-in period of 40 to 42 years: "This will lead our youth to work until they are 70 or 72. ... I support a retirement age at 60, so that everyone goes into retirement in good shape. We have worked all our lives, we should have the right to enjoy our pensions, our children and our grandchildren."

He voiced his anger at Macron's requisitioning of Exxon and Total strikers: "It's unacceptable. In France, we have the right to strike." He criticized Total's decision to grant salary raises below inflation, "when we see that Total made more than €10 billion in profits just in the first six months of the year. Then, they requisition strikers in order to smash the strike movement. It is simply an insult."

Morgane, a graphic designer, stressed that Total and Exxon workers are striking not only for themselves, but for all workers as a class: "In any case, this strike, it is for all Total workers, but it is also for the entire world, it is not just about us. There is no reason to force them to come work, there is a constitutionally protected right to strike. ... Everyone should have a raise."

A number of youth at the rally stressed the mounting economic difficulties they face, and their opposition to inequality and war.

Antoine said he had come because "they are breaking up public education, the hospitals. ... For the last few weeks there have been mobilizations at the National Railways, in Paris public transit, at the refineries and at Total, and so on. Coming here, showing that we are out in force, is a way to turn up the temperature a bit."

He continued, "Housing benefits have not risen in line with the surge in prices, scholarships have not either. ... Students have more and more difficulty even

buying pasta, prices have virtually risen 40 percent. Electricity costs are also going up, we saw last year that students were lining up to receive food aid.”

For students, said Coline, inflation “plays out at the expense of our living standards. We are not at the point where we cannot eat, but we do not eat well, we can’t necessarily heat our living spaces well. For transportation, we will have to go a lot on foot.” She added, “I am deeply opposed to war, there is no point fighting when we should be coming together against the real problems such as ecology and social justice.”

Tanguy, a student, stressed the international nature of the struggles that must be waged, be they on economic issues or the war danger: “The situation is ever more critical. I support all the strikes. ... While certain people stuff their wallets, more and more French people live in precarious conditions, which is happening around the world. We see what happened in Sri Lanka, what happened in Britain, so we are in the street to show that it is important.”

He added, “It is always the people who suffer from war, they are sent as cannon fodder to the front based on decisions by powerful people who do not suffer the consequences. ... When I see what is going on in Ukraine, I am horrified that world leaders have decided to trigger such a war.”

Several protesters interviewed by the WSWs stressed both their deep opposition to war in Ukraine and their surprise that there is not a larger anti-war movement amid the danger of a disastrous military escalation between NATO and Russia.

Antoine said, “We cannot support what Vladimir Putin did when he invaded Ukraine. At the same time, we cannot lapse into this blissful love of NATO that seems to have overcome many television pundits and the bourgeoisie. ... It is a shock that will be paid for by the popular classes in Russia and the NATO countries, above all in Europe. We are seeing rising inflation that is already there, and also a surge in energy prices. Politics will now decide: who will bear the costs of inflation, the world of workers or of management and shareholders?”

Clément, who was marching “to defend the cause of the workers, of ecological emergency, and overall of socialism,” stressed the link between the Ukraine war and the refinery strike: “It was the war in Ukraine that caused the supply problems on natural gas and petrol,

and [the strikers] are trying to block the practices of Total on fuel prices.”

Kamal said: “When I hear Mr. Macron come on television to explain that he will give €100 billion to finance weapons to help Ukraine go fight Russia, and no one reacts, I am dumbstruck. My neighbor, at the end of the month, she has to count every penny in order to eat. ... France, the major powers, always have money for weapons, to go massacre people, but for the working classes, those who live in want, there is nothing.”

He added: “It is NATO’s fault that it got this far. Did not the Russians ask Ukraine that NATO bases not be placed on its territory? Still there was a whole campaign to do precisely that, however. This means that NATO was carrying out provocations, that it created the situation. Mr. Putin is not all innocent, but the Western countries are not, either. ... We let the West plunder African countries. Then, when enough misery had been created in those countries, they came back to create misery at home in the Western countries, that is, the major powers themselves.”



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