

To fight war and French pension cuts, rebel against the union bureaucracy!

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23 January 2023

On Thursday, millions of workers across France went on strike and over two million joined massive protests against French President Emmanuel Macron's pension reform. The increase in the minimum retirement age to 64 and the length of the contribution period are reactionary measures rejected by the overwhelming majority of French people.

Defending pensions requires a new strategy and a new perspective for struggle. The union bureaucracies that have been negotiating with Macron for six years will not stop his social attacks. Macron pushed through this very same pension cut in 2020 after waiting for the end of the railway workers' strike against it; the president abandoned it before it was ratified, however, amid an uncontrollable eruption of social anger and wildcat strikes in March 2020 against his murderous management of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Today, the NATO imperialist powers stand firmly behind Macron's austerity. As they wage war on Russia in Ukraine, risking escalation into a nuclear world war, they all want to spend billions to arm Ukraine. To finance the sending of tanks and other weapons against Russia, Macron wants to redirect tens of billions of euros from pensions to the army and the pocket of the financial oligarchy.

How can workers avoid in 2023 a repeat of Macron's adoption of this reform in 2020? What is needed is a generalized rebellion of the workers against the grip that national union bureaucracies exercise over the class struggle. This is what Macron fears, as he said at the council of ministers meeting last week: "We must make a distinction between the unions opposed to the reform, which are calling for demonstrations within a normal framework, and those who are deliberately trying to block the country."

It is only by fighting to overcome the obstacle posed

by the union bureaucracies, and to break with the narrow national outlook they impose on the class struggle, that the working class can build a movement capable of stopping the war, defeating Macron and stopping the fall in living standards.

The struggle of the "yellow vests" in 2018-2019, coordinated via social media, confirmed that a break with the union bureaucracies is possible. Isolated by the unions and assaulted by riot police, the "yellow vests" suffered from the absence of independent organizations capable of mobilizing workers to defend them. Only such rank-and-file organizations, in factories and workplaces across Europe and beyond, can destroy the economic power of the financial oligarchy that supports Macron's reforms.

Thirty-two years after the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, capitalism once again faces a mortal crisis. NATO's wars in Iraq, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria aimed at dominating Eurasia have culminated in a direct military confrontation with Russia and China. The ruling classes impose draconian levels of inequality, fueled by multi-trillion-euro bank bailouts after repeated world financial crises, which have triggered the global inflationary spiral.

Macron's argument that pensions must be slashed so they can be sustained is a blatant lie. Inequality figures provided by the NGO Oxfam reveal the brutal and irrational nature of his reform.

Since 2020, while the richest 1 percent have captured two-thirds of the new wealth worldwide, the wealth of the top 10 French billionaires has increased by €189 billion. The wealth of Bernard Arnault, the richest man in the world, rose from €85.7 billion to €179 billion by the end of 2020, a fortune equivalent to that of 20 million French people. It is not that society cannot afford pensions, but that society cannot afford the rich.

In this explosive situation, the petty-bourgeois organizations that the capitalist media pass off as the “left” are lulling workers to sleep, claiming that the union bureaucracies, under pressure from the masses, will organize a fightback. François Ruffin of La France Insoumise (LFI) says that the mobilization today is “the time to take stock” and “show that there is a very firm opposition” to Macron.

Olivier Besancenot’s Pabloite NPA, like the Morenoite website *Révolution Permanente*, is claiming that the union bureaucracies will prepare a “battle plan” against the pension cut.

In reality, to wage a sustainable political battle against Macron and the ruling class, workers will have to reject the political lie that they can rely on the union bureaucracies to wage the class struggle.

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The union bureaucracies, faced with the global crises of war, pandemic and spiraling inflation, are adopting nationalist policies that align them with Macron. The CGT leadership not only approved the 2020 EU bailout that inflated the wealth of the investing classes; it also voted in favor of a resolution to support of the NATO war on Russia in Ukraine. Meanwhile, the union bureaucracies are imposing wage increases in many industries that are well below inflation, undermining workers’ purchasing power. But rising inequality, inflation, the pandemic and the NATO-Russia war have set in motion a new international eruption of class struggle, which is increasingly pushing workers to rebel against the diktat of national bureaucracies and pseudo-left parties internationally.

As workers are mobilizing in France, their class brothers and sisters are mobilizing in Europe and around the world. Strikes in multiple sectors including nurses, education and transport are rocking Britain, despite the hostility of the Labour Party and its allied union bureaucracies. A national teachers’ strike against low pay is shaking Portugal. In the United States, the center of world imperialism, after strikes that shook the auto industry and that threaten to erupt in the railways, nurses and teachers are striking.

To unify these forces, the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), the world Trotskyist movement, has called for the building of the International Workers’ Alliance of Rank-and-File

Committees and an international anti-war movement of youth and workers.

The Parti de l’égalité socialiste (PES), the French section of the ICFI, bases its policy on a historically justified optimism in the revolutionary capacities of the working class. The experiences of the workers’ Soviets that made the October 1917 revolution in Russia and the factory committees and workers’ militias that resisted Nazism in France and across Europe have created deep traditions of self-organization in the European and international working class. In the face of the war in Ukraine, the capitalist economic crisis and the bankruptcy of the pseudo-left, new revolutionary eruptions are brewing.

The role of the PES is to explain to workers and youth the need to build a political movement to transfer state power to the organizations they will create to fight against the capitalist ruling elite. It calls on workers and young people who agree with this perspective to support its work and help build the PES and the ICFI as the Trotskyist vanguard among workers and young people.



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