

Stop the pension cuts and the war, bring down the Macron government!

Parti de l'égalité socialiste (France)

8 March 2023

Yesterday, around 3 million workers went on strike and marched in cities across France on calls to “block the economy” and force a stop to President Emmanuel Macron’s pension cuts. This mass strike movement, the largest in France since the May-June 1968 general strike 55 years ago, has a historic character. A confrontation with revolutionary implications is emerging between the working class and the Macron government.

Workers in critical industries at the heart of the economy followed calls to bring the economy to a halt. The public sector, rail and mass transit, power stations and refineries, as well as auto, aerospace and shipbuilding all saw massive strikes. Students organized blockades at universities in Paris, Lyon and Rennes or sent delegations to march alongside striking workers. Today, strikes are continuing at refineries and fuel depots to cut off fuel to gas stations and to force Macron to capitulate.

Explosive anger is building up in the working class, far beyond even the millions who marched. Three-quarters of the French people oppose Macron’s cuts, which aim to divert tens of billions of euros from pensions to fund tax cuts for the rich and the €413 billion military build-up as France intensifies its participation in the NATO-Russia war in Ukraine. Polls show fully six French people in 10 want strikers to block the economy to compel Macron to surrender.

The Parti de l'égalité socialiste (PES), the French section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), advances the following demands:

1) The working class must bring down the Macron government. Defying overwhelming public opposition, Macron is slashing the living standards of workers while recklessly stoking war between nuclear-armed states. His government is not a democratic regime that can be reformed, but the unrepentant tool of a financial oligarchy implacably hostile to the masses.

2) End the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, which threatens to erupt into a total war across Europe and the world, involving the use of nuclear weapons. Stopping this war is the essential precondition for transferring billions of euros from the machinery of mass killing to paying for critical social needs.

3) Impound the massive funds used on bank bailouts that have grossly enriched the financial aristocracy and are fueling devastating inflation internationally. These bailouts have raised the wealth of French billionaires alone by €200 billion just since the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020. These public funds must meet critical social needs and place major industries under public ownership, so that they can provide jobs and affordable services to working people.

4) Above all, spread mass strike action beyond the borders of France, across Europe and internationally in a revolt against the

pro-capitalist trade union bureaucracies. In a globalized economy led by transnational corporations, in which capitalist ruling elites have already dragged Russia, Ukraine and all the NATO powers into a war, none of the essential demands of the working class can be met by mobilizing workers only within one country.

The movement in France is a sharp expression of an objectively revolutionary situation emerging throughout Europe, as mass strikes spread across the continent. Millions of workers are marching against inflation and wage austerity in Germany and Britain and against health cuts in Spain. National rail strikes are underway in Belgium, Italy and Greece, where an explosive movement has developed against the right-wing Mitsotakis government and the entire ruling elite’s decades-long pursuit of devastating EU austerity after a horrific train crash that claimed 57 lives.

In Turkey, explosive anger is mounting against the complicity of the government and the entire political establishment in the building of substandard housing that has left tens and possibly hundreds of thousands dead in last month’s Turkish-Syrian earthquakes. While it spends billions on war, the government has failed to organize even a timely search-and-rescue operation to find earthquake victims.

These are not a series of trade union struggles that can be resolved by a negotiation with one or other national government. They are products of a mortal international crisis of capitalism. In every country, workers raise similar demands against global problems, such as inflation, austerity, environmental degradation, repression and war; everywhere they are met with legal threats or police crackdowns by discredited capitalist governments. This is setting into motion revolutionary explosions not only in France, but across Europe and internationally.

The bringing down of Macron is not a task that can be left to the French political establishment, bringing in a new capitalist regime. Rather, it must be accomplished by the struggle of the working class for power, overthrowing capitalism and the European Union to build the United Socialist States of Europe.

The PES opposes attempts to subordinate the initiatives of the working class to the national union bureaucracies. It calls instead for the formation of rank-and-file committees, independent of the bureaucracies, to organize and coordinate struggles and political action by the working class in France and internationally.

This places the PES in irreconcilable opposition to the petty-bourgeois pseudo-left parties in France. All are adapting to or openly supporting the US-NATO war and working to delay the coming social explosion, and, if it cannot be avoided, to block a struggle to bring down Macron. While the Stalinist General Confederation of Labor (CGT) boss Philippe Martinez is boasting of his “courtesy calls” with

Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne, La France Insoumise (LFI) leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon is appealing to Macron to hold a referendum on his cuts or to hold new elections.

The pro-capitalist perspective animating these forces was concisely laid out by Juan Chingo, a leader of the breakaway *Révolution permanente* faction of the Pabloite New Anti-Capitalist Party.

In an interview this weekend on the *Révolution permanente* website, Chingo declared: “The situation is not revolutionary, I agree with this assessment.”

He called for promoting democracy under capitalism via a national constitutional reform of French parliamentarism. He said the reform had to “develop elements of a democratic program, like the creation of a unicameral parliament that will be both legislative and executive.” The goal that underlies this proposal is to help “the mass movement have experiences with bourgeois representative democracy,” he added.

This is a political trap for the working class. There is no deal to be made with Macron. As for the goal of helping workers make experiences with capitalist representative democracy, it is reactionary and false for one essential reason: The capitalist ruling oligarchy can no more democratically represent the people in 2023 than the feudal aristocracy could when the people of Paris stormed the Bastille, at the outset of the 1789 French Revolution.

Chingo’s proposal to concentrate all governmental power in one house of parliament under capitalism is a proposal for a reactionary parliamentary dictatorship. One fact starkly underscores this point: The figure the French bourgeoisie is building up as the main political rival of Macron is the neo-fascist Marine Le Pen.

The PES is fighting to build rank-and-file committees of workers and youth to mobilize the working class independently of the bureaucrats and pseudo-left charlatans who posture as revolutionaries while supporting capitalism. The necessity of such a policy flows from the great experiences of the Trotskyist movement in the revolutionary struggles of the 20th century.

Many times in history, struggles in France have served as a revolutionary bellwether for workers internationally. The May-June 1936 French general strike was the last great opportunity the working class had to avert the outbreak of World War II via revolution; it then inspired millions of workers who launched strikes and armed insurrections against fascist rule across Nazi-occupied Europe during the war. The May-June 1968 French general strike set off an international wave of struggles that in Europe brought down right-wing governments in Greece, Portugal, Britain and Spain.

But many times in history, as well, French workers accumulated bitter experiences with the political betrayals of revolutionary opportunities. Workers let the revolutionary initiative slip through their fingers and fall into the hands of labor bureaucracies allied with the capitalist parties. The union bureaucracies sold out workers’ struggles in order to avert revolution. This has led to disastrous defeats.

In 1936, the Popular Front between the bourgeois Radical Party, the social democrats and the Stalinist Communist Party blocked the first offensive by offering workers concessions in the Matignon Accords. The Popular Front government then launched a military build-up and a counterrevolutionary slander campaign against Trotsky. The Popular Front government also cracked down on strikes that erupted against the framework of the Matignon Accords. This paved the way for a new world war, France’s defeat in 1940, and the French political establishment’s setting up of a Nazi collaborationist regime.

In 1968, the CGT bureaucracy and the Stalinist PCF worked for weeks to end the general strike and organize a sellout in the Grenelle Accords with the capitalist state. Together with various Pabloite renegades from Trotskyism, they supported the newly-founded Socialist Party (PS) of the bourgeois adventurer and former Nazi collaborator François Mitterrand. Almost immediately after the PS took power in 1981, however, it proved to be a tool of austerity and neocolonial wars in Africa and beyond. This is the party from which Macron—and also Mélenchon, who has proposed himself as Macron’s prime minister—ultimately emerged.

Trotsky explained in 1935 the need to build rank-and-file committees of action to prevent such betrayals by the bureaucracies. Based on the experience of workers committees (*soviets*) that seized power in the October 1917 Revolution in Russia, he called for the formation of such committees before the 1936 general strike. In “Committees of Action, Not People’s Front,” he opposed the alliance between Stalinism, “left” social democrats like Marceau Pivert and the capitalist Radical Party. He wrote:

The reformists and Stalinists fear, above all, to frighten the Radicals. The apparatus of the united front quite consciously plays the role of disorganizer in relation to sporadic movements of the masses. And the “lefts” of the Marceau Pivert type serve to shield this apparatus from the indignation of the masses. The situation can be saved only by aiding the struggling masses to create a new apparatus, in the process of the struggle itself, which meets the requirements of the moment. The Committees of Action are intended for this very purpose... The first condition for this is a clear understanding of the import of the Committee of Action as the only means of breaking the anti-revolutionary opposition of party and trade union apparatus.

These lines resonate 88 years later, as Europe and the world teeter on the edge of a new world war and explosive anger builds against capitalism among workers internationally. The revolutionary possibilities to stop war, raise living standards and create a socialist society are enormous. But in order to act on this potential, we call for the expansion of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) and the building of sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International as the revolutionary Trotskyist vanguard of the working class, fighting for socialism and the United Socialist States of Europe.



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