

Amid mass strikes, France's Morenoite Révolution permanente group embraces capitalist rule

Alex Lantier
13 March 2023

For nearly two months, mass protest strikes by millions of workers and youth have continued in France against President Emmanuel Macron's pension cuts. Three-quarters of the French people oppose the cuts, and 60 percent want a general strike to halt the economy and bring down Macron. Amid the greatest movement in France since the general strikes of 1936 and 1968, mass strikes are unfolding in Germany, Britain, Spain, Belgium, Portugal and Italy, and a bloody NATO-Russia war threatens to erupt into total war across Europe.

This is exposing the political and class gulf between the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), the world Trotskyist movement, and various pseudo-left parties. The ICFI and its French section, the *Parti de l'égalité socialiste* (PES), stress the objectively revolutionary situation and the necessity of building an international revolutionary movement in the working class. The pseudo-left parties, on the other hand, insist that the situation is not revolutionary and that the working class must at all costs be subordinated to capitalist rule.

This is the position of the Morenoite *Révolution permanente* (RP) group, a split-off from the middle class Pabloite New Anticapitalist Party (NPA) tied to the Argentine Socialist Workers Party (PTS), Germany's Revolutionary International Organization (RIO), and *Left Voice* in America. It was the topic of a recent discussion between two RP leaders, Juan Chingo and Romaric Godin, published on its website under the title "Is France on the verge of a mass strike?"

Chingo and Godin noted the upsurge of million-strong strikes in France, but said that the situation nevertheless is not revolutionary. Godin said: "I do not consider that a mass insurrection is the most probable hypothesis, even if the movement will necessarily emerge its own potentialities that may surprise us. I believe that what is at stake is building a social movement that will last and will have a base."

"I do not think the situation is revolutionary; I agree with this observation," Chingo replied. He added that the strike movement must not overthrow capitalism, but try to work under bourgeois rule: "The development of a general strike, and of self-organization of the masses, thus lay out one and the same perspective: developing a genuine counterweight to the power of the bourgeoisie."

This exchange reveals the key difficulty facing workers in France, across Europe and the world. The situation is objectively revolutionary: Capitalism is plunging into war, governments are discredited, and millions are striking. But union bureaucracies and pseudo-left parties like RP, who retain legal and, to a limited extent, political control over strikes, oppose revolutionary measures. Instead, they subordinate workers to impotent negotiations with capitalist politicians like Macron, who are determined to trample public opinion underfoot in order to wage war and slash workers' living standards.

This reveals the enduring significance of the struggle against Stalinism

led by Leon Trotsky, the co-leader with Vladimir Lenin of the October Revolution. He opposed Stalinist officials who, before the outbreak of World War II in 1939, insisted, like RP today, that the situation was not revolutionary. This was the basis of the Stalinists' ill-fated Popular Front alliance with the capitalist Radical Party and the social democrats.

At that time, Trotsky was fighting to found the Fourth International as the Marxist opposition to Stalinism. In 1935, amid the growing radicalization of the French working class facing the growing threats of Hitlerism and far-right leagues at home, Trotsky tore apart the counterrevolutionary arguments of the Stalinists then, echoed by RP today. In *Whither France*, Trotsky wrote:

"In January, the CEC of the Socialist Party launched a program of struggle for power, the destruction of the mechanism of the bourgeois state, the setting up of the workers' and peasants' democracy, the expropriation of banks and heavy industry. However, up to the present, the party has not made the slightest attempt to bring this program before the masses. The Communist Party, in turn, has absolutely refused to come out for the struggle for power. The reason? 'The situation is not revolutionary.'

"The workers' militia? The arming of the workers? Workers' control? A plan of nationalization? Impossible. 'The situation is not revolutionary.' What, then, can we do? Launch weighty petitions with the clergy, compete in empty eloquence with the Radical (Party) and wait? Wait how long? Until the situation becomes revolutionary of its own accord. The scholarly doctors of the Communist International have a thermometer which they place under the tongue of old lady History, and by this means they infallibly determine the revolutionary temperature. But they don't show anyone their thermometer.

"We submit: the diagnosis of the Comintern is entirely false. The situation is revolutionary, as revolutionary as it can be, granted the non-revolutionary policies of the working-class parties. More exactly, the situation is pre-revolutionary. In order to bring the situation to its full maturity, there must be an immediate, vigorous, unremitting mobilization of the masses, under the slogan of the conquest of power in the name of socialism. This is the only way through which the pre-revolutionary situation will be changed into a revolutionary situation. On the other hand, if we continue to mark time, the pre-revolutionary situation will inevitably be changed into one of counterrevolution, and will bring on the victory of Fascism.

“At the present time, all that the pious mouthings of the phrase ‘non-revolutionary situation’ can do is to crush the minds of the workers, paralyse their will and hand them over to the class enemy. Under the cover of such phrases, conservatism, indolence, stupidity and cowardice take possession of the leadership of the proletariat, and the ground is laid, as it was in Germany, for catastrophe.”

Trotsky’s warning was vindicated by history. The situation was revolutionary: Barely a year after he wrote those lines, the working class rose up in the 1936 general strike. And the Stalinist policy—to block a seizure of power by the working class, sell out the 1936 general strike, and save capitalist rule—led to catastrophe. Casting aside the last great opportunity to avert world war via socialist revolution, it paved the way for another fascist victory.

Three years after the Stalinist sell-out of the 1936 general strike, the Popular Front had collapsed and World War II had broken out. Amid France’s military defeat in 1940, the Popular Front parties played a despicable role. While the French Stalinist leadership backed Stalin’s peace pact with Hitler in the first two years of the war, social-democratic and Radical legislators in their majority voted full powers to Nazi-collaborationist dictator Philippe Pétain on July 10, 1940.

Trotsky’s analysis, after 88 years, stands as an indictment of RP’s complacent, pro-capitalist perspective. Millions of workers are striking across Europe, as hundreds of thousands of troops are already being slaughtered in a bloody war in Ukraine between nuclear-armed NATO and Russia. With politically criminal complacency, RP sets out amid enormous danger and crisis to paralyze the will of the proletariat and subordinate it to “social dialog” between pro-NATO union bureaucracies and Macron. It is doing its best to lay the ground for new catastrophes in the 21st century.

RP demands workers “make experiences with bourgeois representative democracy”

The PES explains: What is needed is a vigorous and unremitting mobilization of the masses across Europe and beyond in a struggle for workers power and socialism. It calls for workers to organize in rank-and-file committees, independent of national trade union bureaucracies, to unify the working class as an international revolutionary force and free it from the alien class influence of pro-capitalist bureaucracies.

RP officials would no doubt mock calls for workers’ committees to exercise control over production, nationalize major corporations as public utilities democratically controlled by the workers, and to prepare to defend themselves against far-right gangs or coup threats. Chingo of course says that he also supports “self-organization” of workers. However, he holds out for such organizations not an international revolutionary program for socialism, but a program subordinated to the “democratic” capitalist state on a national basis.

Even as Macron and the parliament run roughshod over public opinion, impose the pension cuts, and impoverish the population in order to divert tens of billions of euros into war spending, Chingo hails “bourgeois representative democracy.” A revolutionary challenge by the working class to Macron’s rubber-stamp parliament and his police-state machine—for RP—is off the table. Left-wing forces, Chingo says,

“should renew their ties to the best of the revolutionary Jacobin tradition or, better, to the Paris Commune, to develop the elements of such a democratic program, like building a unicameral parliament, both legislative and executive. ... All this would really aid the mass movement to make experiences with bourgeois representative democracy and allow to develop consciousness of the need for self-organization, which constitutes in my view the only viable democratic perspective.”

What is the program for political action Chingo proposes? The only concrete demand he advances, remarkably, is to combine the two houses of the French parliament into a single chamber, though both houses are staffed by capitalist reactionaries. Chingo’s attempt to endow this national, pro-capitalist policy with “left” credentials by invoking the 1789 revolution and the 1871 Paris Commune is politically false.

The revolutionaries of 1789-1794 pursued a policy entirely different from that of Chingo. They did not accept feudal oppression and work in the context of the existing, feudal-monarchic regime’s parliamentary institutions. The Constituent Assembly (renamed the Convention in 1792) and the armed peasantry and townsfolk seized and abolished feudal property, overthrew the absolute monarchy, executed the king, and crushed invading European armies that tried to restore feudal rule.

From the dawn of industrial capitalism and of Marxism in the 19th century, the working class has in reality had more than enough experience, especially in France, with “bourgeois representative democracy.”

In 1848, a year after Marx and Engels wrote the *Communist Manifesto*, the working class rose up across Europe. In France, the workers toppled King Louis-Philippe, and the Second Republic was proclaimed. When the capitalist Republic tried to shut down the National Workshops set up to provide jobs to the unemployed, workers took to the streets to avert poverty and starvation. General Eugène Cavaignac led the army and security forces in the mass slaughter of the June Days, killing over 3,000 workers and arresting 25,000.

In March 1871, when the French Third Republic tried to disarm Paris by stealing cannons the city had bought for self-defense amid France’s war against Prussia, revolution again erupted. The working class Commune took power in Paris. It did not, however, emerge as a lasting “counterweight” to bourgeois rule under capitalism, as envisaged by Chingo: Instead, a showdown emerged between the capitalist state and the nascent workers state.

The *Communards* were drowned in blood by the “bourgeois representative democracy” of the Third Republic, who killed 20,000 of them during the Bloody Week of May 21-28, 1871. The leader of the bourgeois regime, Adolphe Thiers, laid out his policy towards the working class on March 24, 1871, as the Third Republic’s army retook Paris by force. Reporting to the National Assembly of his military operations in Paris, Thiers boasted: “I have shed torrents of blood.”

Chingo’s citing of the Paris Commune as an inspiration for a policy of ruling out revolution and encouraging workers to “make experiences with bourgeois representative democracy” only speaks to his utter contempt for the working class. Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks drew diametrically opposite conclusions from the pro-capitalist perspective of RP: In periods of revolutionary crisis, the working class can save itself only by merciless struggle, and democratic rights can be defended only by fighting for socialist revolution.

RP’s roots in a Pabloite rejection of the ICFT’s defense of Trotskyism

RP's endorsement of bourgeois rule and its rejection of socialist revolution is rooted in its Pabloite origins. For over a decade after the launching of the Pabloite NPA in 2009, RP's members worked in the NPA, which descends from the petty-bourgeois forces led by Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel that, 70 years ago, broke with Trotskyism and split with the ICFI. In 1953, Pablo and Mandel argued that Stalinist and bourgeois nationalist forces, not Trotskyism, would offer revolutionary leadership to the working class.

RP came to the fore, however, as the NPA's undeniably counterrevolutionary role was ever more exposed amid the explosive growth of the class struggle since 2018 and the "yellow vest" protests. RP made tactical criticisms of the NPA's embrace of NATO wars for regime change in Libya and Syria, and the NPA's attacks on the "yellow vest" protests against social inequality and Macron. On this basis, RP announced last year that it would function as an independent party.

While certain factions of the French media have tried to market RP as a "Trotskyist" party, it has not in fact broken with the NPA's Pabloite orientation to Stalinist bureaucracies. RP tried to hide this orientation by developing an alliance with the PTS in Argentina. The PTS descends from forces led by Nahuel Moreno, who initially sided with the ICFI against the Pabloites in 1953 but then sought an unprincipled reunification with the Pabloites a decade later, in 1963.

On the decisive issue of the political independence of the working class from Stalinism and imperialism, RP maintains a Pabloite orientation. It describes itself as a tendency that grew by absorbing a generation of young union officials who aspire to rise through the ranks of the CGT union's Stalinist bureaucracy. Significantly, as RP describes the milieu from which it has drawn its members, RP even mentions its interest in anti-Semitic, far-right Franco-Cameroonian singer Dieudonné and his obscene '*quenelle*' gestures. RP writes:

"The workers movement has seen the emergence of a new generation that could help build such an organization. We saw it the first time in the 2014 rail strike where, unfamiliar with the rules of the political and trade-union left, or even sharing unconsciously those of confusionist figures like Dieudonné (it was the high point of the '*quenelles*' phenomenon), they were often ignored by far-left militants. ...

"This generation included radical trade union leaders whose emergence occurs in very particular conditions. As the PCF loses ground inside the CGT, which struggles to recruit new members, young union officials can rather quickly find themselves leading large trade union organizations or bureaucracies. Moreover, they are emerging in the post-'Yellow Vest' context, which threw the trade unions into crisis, weakening the bureaucracy's ability to wall off political and trade union action, and shaping this new generation of working class militants.

"Any revolutionary worthy of the name must lend the greatest attention to this phenomenon, and seek at all costs to join in with this new generation."

RP's orientation to the Stalinist CGT bureaucracy and its sympathies for reactionaries like Dieudonné exposes its pretensions to being a revolutionary party. It seeks to tie workers to the CGT bureaucracy, which led the sell-out of the 1936 and 1968 general strikes and has evolved now ever more dramatically to the right. Today the CGT leadership is negotiating Macron's cuts and issuing public statements endorsing NATO in the NATO-Russia war in Ukraine.

It also shows that RP's calls for "self-organization" of the workers, independent from the union bureaucracies, is a fraud. RP's pro-capitalist perspective is acceptable to the top union officials. As for RP, it is itself little more than a faction of the CGT bureaucracy. Its "democratic" program is but a thin, pseudo-left veneer for a policy of subordinating the working class to the bureaucrats' negotiation of austerity and war with Macron.

Against RP, the PES calls for the formation of independent, rank-and-file committees in the working class, independent of the union bureaucracies. This is the only way for workers to mobilize to bring down the Macron government, stop the NATO-Russia war, reverse the social attacks on the workers, and build a united movement for socialism together with their class brothers and sisters mobilizing in struggle across Europe and the world.

The precondition for building such organizations is a clear conception that their role is to smash the counterrevolutionary obstacle posed by the union bureaucracy and its pseudo-left defenders. This requires the construction of the PES in France and sections of the ICFI across Europe and the world, fighting to build a movement to transfer power to the independent organizations of the working class and to build a global socialist society.



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