

Paris police assault garbage workers striking against Macron's cuts

Anthony Torres
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For a week now, garbage collectors in Paris and other French cities have been striking against Macron's pension cuts. As Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne announced plans to impose the cuts without even a vote in parliament, the Paris police prefecture announced they were banning the strike and requisitioning workers to force them back to work. It is critical to mobilize workers broadly to defend the garbage collectors and other workers whose right to strike is under state attack.

The French state is sending heavily-armed riot police to attack strikers, smash picket lines and force workers back to work. This requisition order is a warning to workers across France and internationally that the capitalist state is waging a frontal assault on the right to strike. This right has been constitutionally guaranteed in France since the fall of the Nazi-collaborationist Vichy regime, which outlawed strikes.

On Thursday morning, in a signal that Macron is preparing brutal repression of continuing protests against pension cuts, police assaulted garbage workers' pickets in the Paris suburb of Ivry.

The government faces explosive mass opposition against its illegitimate pension reform. Millions of people have been demonstrating all over France for several weeks during days of action organized by the trade unions. In a poll published in the *Le Journal du Dimanche* (JDD), 67 percent of French people are in favor of blockading the country. 62 percent want the mobilization to continue despite the adoption of the pension reform.

Last fall, the government also ordered the requisition of striking refinery workers for wage increases and against inflation, while France faced a fuel shortage that weakened the Borne government. This action followed the precedent of the Sarkozy government's use of the requisition order against refinery workers in 2010

to crush strikes that were eventually isolated by union bureaucracies.

Since March 6, the state, Paris City Hall and the prefecture have been working together to crack down on the garbage strike, while seeking to lay blame on each other for carrying out the measure. Darmanin had specifically asked the PS mayor of Paris, Anne Hidalgo, to requisition the garbage collectors on strike until next Monday to remove the more than 9,000 tons of waste. Private companies that operate in other municipalities have been called in to limit the sanitary risks.

On Wednesday, March 15, Paris police prefect Laurent Nunez asked Hidalgo in a letter to requisition the garbage collectors, raising the risk to public health: 'The concentration of garbage, notably food, in certain streets of Paris, [makes] run risks to the population, in that it hinders the safe path of pedestrians, in particular that of the persons with reduced mobility, poses a problem of public hygiene and favors the proliferation of rats, vectors of diseases transmissible to the man.'

Wednesday evening Hidalgo gave her assent to the requisition but without putting it in place herself. She said it was the state's responsibility to requisition workers: 'It is paradoxical that the state asks local authorities to solve a problem that it has itself created, while the requisition is by right a state responsibility.'

Nunez finally announced this Thursday, March 16, the requisition. The city hall provided this Thursday the list of 4,000 garbage workers, so that the prefecture could proceed to the requisitions.

Defying the requisition order is an offence punishable by six months imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 euros.

In addition to the Paris garbage collectors who were on strike, the three incinerators that burn waste in Paris were stopped because of the strike of the personnel.

These are also targeted by the requisition of the striking staff.

Eight buses of gendarmes intervened to smash the strike at the incinerator at Ivry-sur-Seine, including by firing tear gas volleys, after having unblocked another striking incinerator at Vitry-sur-Seine.

Strikers were assaulted, and three were arrested.

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The dictatorial policy of the Macron government and ultimately of the financial markets is to impose its massively unpopular policies and rely on the police forces to physically repress workers' opposition. The mounting financial crisis and the NATO-Russia war are being seized upon by governments in France and across Europe to justify systematically repressing workers and attack the right to strike.

Workers cannot leave the struggle against police repression in the hands of the union bureaucracies. The union leaders have been negotiating the pension reform with the government for months. They seek above all else to find a negotiated settlement with Macron, not to unify the working class and mobilize it against the threat of repression.

Last fall, the union bureaucracies did not seek to mobilize workers more broadly against the requisition of refinery workers. At the Total refinery in La Mède, CGT delegate Fabien Cros said he did not understand what Borne's threat to requisition strikers and unblock the refineries meant. Cros said: 'Unblock the refineries? But we are not blocking, we are on strike. Afterwards, if they want to come and turn the valves themselves... I don't understand the legal framework of this demand.' The CGT bureaucracy then allowed the police to requisition several dozen workers who played critical roles to maintain production.

To coordinate struggles to defend their class brothers and sisters threatened with requisition orders, workers need to build their own rank-and-file committees, independent of the union bureaucracies.

The global capitalist crisis and the struggle of workers who are ready to blockade the economy underline the objectively revolutionary character of the situation in France and internationally. The struggle to defend democratic and social rights against austerity and police-state rule is indissolubly linked to the struggle against war and the strike struggles that are

mounting in countries across Europe. The perspective of negotiating with Macron in the union bureaucracies' national framework is bankrupt.

The task of the workers in France is to unite their struggles with the workers in Europe and the beyond who are fighting the international financial aristocracy. This entails a struggle to bring down the Macron government, stop the NATO-Russia war, and seize the massive public wealth being transferred to the super-rich in endless bank bailouts. For this the workers must create their own organizations independent of the trade unions, build the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, and take up the struggle for socialism.



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