

# French police assault refinery workers striking against pension cuts

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As anger and strikes rise after the announcement that President Emmanuel Macron could pass his pension cuts without a vote in the National Assembly, Macron is requisitioning refinery workers and sending police to assault their picket lines in an attempt to break the strike.

Workers and youth must struggle, independently of the union bureaucracies, to defend the refinery workers targeted by Macron. A confrontation with revolutionary implications is emerging between the working class and the capitalist state. Already a wave of strikes against austerity and inflation by millions of workers is exploding across Europe—in Germany, Britain, Portugal, Greece, Belgium, the Netherlands and beyond.

Massive strikes are taking place in strategic sectors of the French economy such as refineries and oil depots, which are now causing major fuel shortages. Students have blocked universities in several French cities and sent delegations to march alongside strikers.

Beyond the millions of people who marched, three-quarters of the French people are opposed to the reform, which would divert tens of billions of euros from pensions to tax cuts to the rich and to increase the military budget to 413 billion euros. For French imperialism, this serves to prepare an intensification of the NATO-led war against Russia in Ukraine. In the working class, on the other hand, six out of 10 French people want the strikers to block the economy to defeat Macron.

Since March 7, refinery workers have been blocking refineries in response to a call from the General Confederation of Labor's (CGT) Chemical Industry federation. Six of France's eight refineries in France are on strike. In northwestern France, the Gonfreville-l'Orcher refinery, the largest owned by TotalEnergies

in France, was put on cold shutdown this Tuesday. Only activity linked to maintaining the safety of the installations at the plant is continuing.

In the Lyon region, the TotalEnergies refinery in Feyzin (Rhône) has stopped shipments since Monday. In Loire-Atlantique, the Donges refinery has been shut down for several weeks for technical reasons.

Since Monday, the workers have shut down the installations of the Petroineos site at Lavera in Martigues. Staff representatives went around this weekend to the five teams working in alternating production. "We are between 80 and 90 percent of strikers on these operational teams," announced the CGT delegate of the site, Sébastien Varagol.

Fuel shortages are now beginning to be felt throughout France. Shortages of either diesel or gasoline are being faced by 10 percent of service stations. In all, at least 23 departments have at least 10 percent of service stations "in difficulty."

In the Bouches-du-Rhône, the worst-hit department which is located around Marseille, one out of two service stations was suffering from fuel shortages on Monday afternoon. Motorists often have to wait hours to fill up. However, the movement remains supported by motorists who encourage strikers to continue. In the Vaucluse department, gas stations are limiting the amount of fuel per motorist.

Faced with the crisis caused by these fuel shortages, the Macron government sent riot police to attack picket lines and requisition the workers, to break the strike and force them back to work.

Clashes broke out late on March 21, at the Fos-sur-Mer oil depot near Marseille, where the authorities proceeded to the first requisition of workers striking against the pension reform.

Several hundred trade unionists, mainly from the

CGT, gathered in front of the depot “in support” of the requisitioned strikers, blocking one of the site’s accesses. When the demonstrators wanted to move towards another access, through which tankers were entering the depot, which was protected by riot police, a tense confrontation ensued. Exchanges of projectiles and shots of tear gas grenades made the demonstrators retreat. Three members of the National Police’s Republican security companies (CRS) were reportedly seriously injured.

With his police assault on the refineries, Macron is sending a signal that he intends to violently crack down on all working class opposition to his policies. Violent clashes between heavily armed police and thousands of youth and workers are continuing in all major cities of France. The Macron government has no intention of making any concessions and is openly evolving as an authoritarian regime.

This is not a show of strength on the part of Macron, but an admission of weakness. The movement of the working class is growing in intensity and taking more and more explosive forms, sowing fear in the ruling circles. A riot police commander told the news website Médiapart: “We are on the eve of an insurrection. I’m afraid that one of my guys will kill a demonstrator ... The President is playing a very dangerous game.”

In the face of police repression, workers cannot count on the union bureaucracy. While workers are being gassed and bludgeoned, CGT National Secretary Philippe Martinez has complained but makes no call to mobilize workers to defend their class brothers and sisters.

Martinez said: “These are organized rallies, there are families who come to protest, and I find moreover ... that there is a strong police repression. Surely there were orders from the Ministry of the Interior, because in front of these gatherings ... there is a strong repression towards demonstrators who are there in a completely peaceful way, with their children etc. It is serious.”

The union bureaucracy is only superficially simulating opposition to Macron and to his cuts, which they in fact negotiated with him. Faced with explosive social anger, the union bureaucracies organize strikes not to overthrow Macron, but to avoid losing control and being overwhelmed by the explosive movement of the workers. But also terrified by the workers’ anger,

just like Macron, union officials do not organize serious solidarity actions, leaving the police repression with a largely open field to try to break the strikes and demoralize the workers.

Against such obstacles, the workers will find no other way out than to build their own organizations of struggle, rank-and-file committees independent of the union bureaucracies.

Only such organizations can fight consistently against the Macron government and its repression. For the workers, the only viable perspective is to transfer power from the reactionary machine of the capitalist police state to its organizations of struggle in a socialist revolution. The way forward is to build the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) in the working class, and sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) as the revolutionary vanguard of the working class, fighting for the United Socialist States of Europe.



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