As strikes mount against Macron's cuts, French union bureaucracy tries to orchestrate sellout

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President Emmanuel Macron's government is an illegitimate dictatorship of the banks, ruling against the people, that must be brought down. Three-quarters of French people oppose the pension cuts he has rammed through parliament without a vote. As millions march today in another nationwide trade union day of action called against the pension cuts, masses of workers and youth support escalating protests and strikes against Macron.

A recent Ifop poll found 62 percent support for "hardening" action against Macron. The further down the income ladder, the more the determination to fight mounts. Only 48 percent of those with per capita family monthly incomes over €2,500 support intensifying the struggle against Macron, compared to 74 percent with per capita family monthly income under €900. 68 percent of those under 50 support stepping up action against Macron, as do 74 percent of those aged 50 to 64.

This sets the working class on a collision course with the union bureaucracy, which is terrified of the confrontation emerging between the working class and the capitalist state, and is coordinating with Macron an attempt to orchestrate a sellout. Union confederations are signaling their openness to resume talks with Macron, even as state officials insist they will not go back on Macron's pension cuts.

These events vindicate the perspective advanced by the *Parti de l'égalité socialiste* (PES). A political movement must be built among masses of rank-and-file workers and youth, independent of the union bureaucracies, calling to bring down Macron.

Yesterday morning, just before an emergency meeting of the government, Laurent Berger, the head of the French Democratic Labor Confederation (CFDT), France's largest union, gave an extensive interview on France2 television. His remarks, which were no doubt closely discussed with Macron government officials beforehand, called to reopen talks with Macron and discuss deadlines to stop strikes against the government.

"I am concerned by this situation," Berger said. Warning of "a political climate that is dangerous" and "mounting anger," he called to not "fall into the insanity that could take over this country, with violence and also very deep social anger." Berger added, "We have to turn the temperature down, not stoke things up."

Asked about how much longer the CFDT would authorize strike action, Berger indicated it might call them off starting in three weeks, when France's Constitutional Council is expected to validate Macron's pension cuts. Speaking of today's national trade union day of action, Berger said, "No, it's not necessarily the last one… We will probably go on, at least until the Constitutional Council."

Berger then appealed to Macron to utter a few empty phrases that the CFDT bureaucracy can use as a fig leaf to justify a sellout. "I call upon the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister to understand that there is a way out of this, but that they have to make a sign on their side," he said. Such a sign, he said, would allow for a "pause" in the movement. He proposed as one possible "sign" the convening of a public discussion "for six months of questions of work and pensions."

Berger's remarks were echoed shortly after by Philippe Martinez, the outgoing head of the Stalinist General Confederation of Labor (CGT) bureaucracy, who stressed that he is ready to go see Macron for talks anytime. Martinez said, "We are ready to go in if it's to say, we stop everything and we restart on the right bases, then there is no problem. We need to know the objective of the meeting."

These bureaucrats all know that the talks they are proposing would be based on political surrender to Macron and accepting his pension cuts. Martinez, to be sure, cynically phrased his comments to make it seem that the CGT is only ready to negotiate with Macron if it is on the basis of withdrawing the cuts. But shortly before he and Berger spoke, French government spokesman Olivier Véran made clear that Macron sees his cuts as a settled question, and that all talks would proceed on the basis of accepting them.

"The law on pensions is behind us," Véran told BFM-TV. "We are waiting for it to be validated by the Constitutional Council. It is something we had announced during the election campaign, even if people didn't necessarily vote for us for that reason, as we all know."

Macron in his cabinet meetings responded favorably to the unmistakable offer of Berger and Martinez to orchestrate a sellout of the struggle.

"We must continue extending an open hand to the trade union forces," Macron said. However, he made clear that he is extending an open hand to the union bureaucracy in order to prepare a sellout of the rank and file, against which he is planning a massive escalation of police violence.

Over the period until the Constitutional Council ruling, Macron said, the government has to intensify talks with its "social partners" in the union bureaucracy. He called on his ministers "to use the next three weeks to discuss with elected officials, mayors and the social partners to appease tensions, continue implementing reforms, and repair public services."

The government is moreover planning a new escalation of police violence against today's protests. At a press conference yesterday evening, Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin declared that there are "very important risks of disturbances to public order" today. He announced an "unprecedented" police deployment, particularly in Paris where he will send 5,000 heavily armed riot police against the protest.

Darmanin's threats are an act of desperation, as social anger and strike activity continue to mount, and the crisis of the government intensifies. A fifth of flights and a larger proportion of regional trains are being canceled due to ongoing strikes, and the refinery strike is leaving fuel stations empty, particularly in the west and southeast. In the Loire-Atlantique region, 55 percent of fuel stations are empty. With the Louvre museum in Paris now on strike, there are also reports that 30 percent of elementary school teachers will strike today.

The real balance of forces between the government and the working class was revealed by comments Sunday from Labor Minister Olivier Dussopt on the state of the riot police. Dussopt confirmed that French ministers "have been asked to only organize public appearances when it is absolutely necessary," as the police deployments necessary to protect them from the people risk straining the riot police. Dussopt said, "Our security forces are exhausted" as they "are mobilized every night" against protests.

Precisely because the union bureaucracies do not want a defeat of Macron, which they would view as a revolutionary threat to a figure who is for them an ally and negotiating partner, the union bureaucracies are moving amid this desperate crisis of the government to orchestrate a sellout.

This underscores the political significance of the call launched by the PES to initiate a mass movement to bring down Macron, as the focus of a movement of the workers and youth independent of the union bureaucracies.

In every workplace and school, resolutions must be passed demanding the bringing down of Macron. This requires holding general assemblies of the work force and student body in workplaces and schools, to debate and adopt these resolutions, and forming workplace committees to share and publicize these resolutions and thus unite the working class against Macron. Such an independent mobilization of the working class, making workers aware of their militancy and collective strength, can create conditions for a general strike to bring down Macron.

Such a movement, creating independent organs of struggle in the working class that open the way to transfer state power to democratically controlled institutions of the working class, is the political alternative to the shameless sellout that the CFDT and CGT bureaucracies are seeking to prepare.

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