

Striking French rail workers call to bring down Macron regime

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On Monday and Tuesday, the WSWS interviewed striking railway workers in Paris. Since March 7, garbage workers, refiners and rail workers have been on strike against the Macron government and its anti-democratic pension cuts. During Tuesday's day of action, WSWS interviewed Alain, a rail worker who is on strike at the Gare du Nord (North Station) in Paris.

Alain explained his point of view on bourgeois democracy after Macron imposed his attack on pensions without a vote, even in the Assembly, saying, "We are no longer in democracy for us. We are in a virtual dictatorship. We are in a society of absolute capital."

About the call of the Socialist Equality Party (PES) to mobilize workers to bring down Macron, Alain said, "Yes, it is necessary because Macron no longer has legitimacy. When he was elected, there was abstention. The few people who voted did so to oppose the far right. He has no legitimacy now. He can't say, 'I was elected by the people.' That's not true, since the people deserted the voting process."

On Tuesday, Laurent Berger and Philippe Martinez, the leaders of the CFDT and CGT unions, had announced that they were relaunching negotiations with Macron—even as more than 60 percent of French people want a general strike against Macron to block the economy.

Asked why the union bureaucracy was pursuing a policy contrary to the aspirations of the rank and file, Alain said, "There are those at the top, do they listen to the rank and file? I am not sure. I know that, for example, at the CGT, we do not agree with what they say. I know that there are a lot of CGT members who don't agree with wanting to negotiate with the government, who are for the general strike and uniting all the workers in the different unions."

Alain also explained why a mass movement against Macron is taking place alongside strikes across Europe, including in Germany, Spain, the UK and Portugal. He said, "Today, the people are well aware that all the direction being taken, including by the European Union, is not the right one, that the leaders today listen more to big capital than to the people, and that today, all the decisions are taken only in the interest of the companies."

He added, "I think everyone sees it. In every country, it's the same thing, whether it's inflation, whether it's us on pensions or anything else, people see it and I think that's why they can't take it anymore. And the fact of hearing that it is happening elsewhere and that it is starting to grow, people say indeed, there are people who are in the street, so I want to go there, too, because I am also angry and I also want to defend my point of view. And that, for me, it is important, it is good. It has to become more widespread."

Alain pointed out that the pension reform is the culmination of decades of social reaction and privatization in France: "You can't work like that for years. The entire public service has become private. Even at the National Railways, we are asked to be profitable, whereas we were supposed to be able to give trains to people who were far away, for example from Paris, who work in villages, so that they could come to work, so that they would not be isolated in their small regions. And all these trains are being eliminated because they are no longer profitable."

He continued, "Then there is the public hospital service, it has become a disaster. Today, whether it's the hospital or us, the National Railways, since we are a public service, we are asked for profitability. And they want to make us to pay into the pension scheme for even more years, while reducing wages and increasing

contributions.”

On Monday, the WSWS spoke to Yohan and Stéphane, railway workers at the Montparnasse train station in Paris. They are also on strike against the pension reform and the rise in prices that is eating into their wages. They also went to the incinerator of Ivry-sur-Seine in support of the garbage collectors whose picket line was attacked by the police on Monday morning and forcibly requisitioned.

About Macron's use of Article 49.3 of the French constitution to force through his pension cuts without a vote, Yohan said, “There is no more democracy in France. In a real democracy, we could simply discuss, put things in order. But there, on the other side, we can see that they don't care. Democracy is their democracy, from their point of view. It is their democracy. Democracy is on the other side, it's not you.”

Yohan also denounced Macron's argument that there is no money for pensions after all the bank bailouts and Macron's increase in military spending: “[Macron] says there is no money, he needs 12 billion euros from pensions. But on the side, we distribute, how much was it? It was 80 billion for the shareholders, for example, and we come to spend 400 billion of it again” on the military.

Stéphane explained why he thinks workers should mobilize against Macron: “We want to live starting first from human needs. We want to work, we are not lazy. We want our work to be useful. It makes sense that it is paid at its fair value and that the working time, the balance between working time and personal life can be adequate and correct.’

On why workers are rising up across Europe, Stéphane said, “I think it's simple: it's the direction Europe took a few years ago, ‘We have to liberalize.’ I think that we are running out of steam, that people can see that. I didn't know, but I was told when the EU was voted in 1992, that it was a social Europe. We can see where ‘social’ Europe has led us ... There are lobbyists everywhere, we can see that. I mean, we know very well that we have a president who made a bank.”

The struggle to bring down the Macron government, explained Stéphane, “It's really a class struggle. We can even go back, I think, to 1789, we're not too far from there. Only then it was the bourgeoisie against royalty. Now it's the workers against the bourgeois.”



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