

No to French unions' "mediation" with the state! Mobilize workers to bring down Macron!

Alex Lantier
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For over two months, millions of workers in France have been protesting against President Emmanuel Macron's pension cuts, which are opposed by three-quarters of the French people. Anger erupted after Macron imposed the cuts without a vote in parliament, claiming the cuts were necessary to preserve the country's credibility on the financial markets. The state stands exposed as a dictatorship of the banks, and Macron as a president ruling against the people, and who must be brought down.

Anger is continuing to mount, and strikes are underway in refineries, airports and train stations across France. However, the movement in the working class and youth now faces a major political obstacle: the very same union federations that, for two months, have authorized and announced strikes against Macron.

On March 26, just before the last national protest strike, French Democratic Labor Confederation (CFDT) leader Laurent Berger called for a stand-down of the strike movement. "I am concerned by this situation," Berger said. Echoing the rhetoric of the police agencies, he warned of "a political climate that is dangerous" and "insanity that could take over this country" and demanded: "We have to turn the temperature down, not stoke things up."

According to the capitalist media, the union bureaucracies are leading this movement. In reality, they are actually moving to betray it, working in this explosive political situation to prop up Macron's rule against the people. Berger argued in favor of cooling down workers' anger and demobilizing the strikes, based on accepting Macron's illegitimate cuts as the starting point of the discussion.

Yesterday on France Info, Berger said he would go

next week to Matignon Palace, the official residence of Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne, who led the promotion of Macron's pension cuts. He said: "It's a space we must grab hold of. ... But we are not naive. We know that the purpose of this meeting is surely not to announce the withdrawal of the reform."

Berger said he would go see Borne to "get back around the table on jobs and work and give social compromise a chance," while organizing a "pause" in public references to the pension cuts. He warned that if Macron continues to force ahead, it could fatally discredit not only the government but also the union bureaucracies. He said, "If we simply bank on opposition rotting away, there will be more serious consequences: lasting resentment for which we will all pay dearly."

Other unions including the General Confederation of Labor (CGT), France's Solidarity union and the French Managers Confederation (CFE) are all publicly discussing Berger's proposal now.

Workers and youth must draw far-reaching conclusions from this unabashed betrayal of the struggle against Macron's cuts. Control over strikes and protests against Macron must be taken out of the hands of the union bureaucracies, which support Macron even when he tramples underfoot the will of the people. Indeed, the union bureaucrats are concerned about the danger that a struggle against Macron will undermine their own privileges and positions, not that Macron's cuts will undermine the living standards and social and democratic rights of their members.

No less than Macron, in fact, the CFDT bureaucracy and its political allies are violating the will of the French people. Only a few days ago, an Ifop poll

confirmed that 62 percent of the population wanted the movement against Macron to take on “harder” forms after he tried to impose his cuts without even a vote in parliament. Yet the union bureaucracies, not seeking but fearing a social explosion, are moving in the diametrically opposite direction.

The alternative, as the *Parti de l'égalité socialiste* (PES) has explained throughout this struggle, is to build committees of the rank and file in workplaces, schools and working class neighborhoods. These committees must reject ties with the union bureaucracies, who are betraying the struggle against Macron. They can organize and coordinate strikes, defend strikers from police attack and wage a political campaign mobilizing workers and youth to bring down Macron.

The union bureaucracies' overt turn against the mass movement opposing Macron also vindicates the PES' opposition to all the middle class political groups that, in recent months, appealed to the union bureaucracies to formulate a “winning strategy” against Macron.

The bureaucracies refuse to formulate such a strategy because they support Macron against the rising tide of workers' struggles, not the other way around. If they call strikes, it is because they fear that if they do not, the workers would go out on strike anyway and, having escaped the union bureaucracies' control, would provoke an uncontrollable social explosion.

The need for an irreconcilable break with the union bureaucracies and their political allies is rooted in this: The treachery of Berger and other officials is not the result of a tactical error or personal failings of one or another individual bureaucrat. Workers cannot prevent such acts of treachery by replacing Berger with someone else. Rather, it is rooted in the material interests of the union bureaucracies, as nationally based organizations deeply integrated into the capitalist state.

Workers in France and internationally broadly recognize that over the last historical epoch, the unions have ceased to wage militant struggles. These national organizations cannot coordinate strikes against transnational corporations in the era of capitalist globalization. After countless sellouts over the last 50 years, their working class base has collapsed. Only around 7 percent of French workers are unionized, and the resulting collapse of the unions' dues base means that their multibillion-euro budgets are now 90 percent

financed by state and corporate subsidies.

Therefore, Berger instinctively identifies with Macron, fears a radicalization of the working class and readily agrees to pension cuts for workers to prevent them from bringing down Macron.

Against the treachery of the union bureaucracies, the best allies of workers in France are their class brothers and sisters across Europe and around the world. Already, a massive upsurge of the class struggle and a growth of rank-and-file committees are underway internationally. Last month alone has seen strike actions in Britain and warning strikes in Germany by millions of workers engaged in wage disputes, as well as nationwide teachers, rail workers or public sector strikes in many countries, including Belgium, Italy and Portugal.

This upsurge of social anger and class struggle and the growth of independent workers' organizations will lay the basis for workers to take control of their own strikes and build a powerful movement, defying the opposition of the union bureaucracies, to bring down Macron.



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