

Newly elected French CGT union leader rushes to prop up Macron

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The General Confederation of Labor (CGT) held its 53rd congress last week, as the working class mounted a direct political struggle against President Emmanuel Macron over his imposition of pension cuts without a vote, amid mass popular opposition. A surprise candidate, the general secretary of the General Union of Engineers, Managers and Technicians (Ugict) and in charge of gender issues, Sophie Binet, was elected to replace Philippe Martinez.

Binet's election is directly linked to the counterrevolutionary policy pursued by the CGT bureaucracy in the struggles against Macron. Before the congress, Martinez made no clear statement as to whether he would participate in the "mediation" with Macron launched by France's other union bureaucracies, which aims to stabilize the government and prevent workers from bringing down Macron. But in her inaugural speech, Binet announced that she would meet Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne.

Yesterday, Binet tried to cover up this reactionary decision, claiming that her meeting "is likely to be very short" if Borne does not announce the withdrawal of Macron's cuts. She added, "there is no other way out of the crisis than to withdraw the cuts." However, Binet and the CGT bureaucracy are working to give Macron a way out, leaving him in power so that he can try to reimpose his cuts later, just as he postponed his cuts in 2020 and then proposed them again this year.

The CGT congress confirms the WSWs analysis. The bureaucracy seeks to betray the struggle against the pension cuts and against Macron, who rules for the banks against the people and with whom there is nothing to negotiate. To act on the will of a large majority of French people, the working class must bring down Macron by blocking the economy with a general strike. But this requires breaking the diktat of

the union bureaucracies over the class struggle. The preparation of such a struggle requires the construction of a politically independent movement of the rank and file, organized in action committees.

At the CGT congress, divisions erupted inside the bureaucracy in the face of the growing anger of the rank and file. The congress delegates voted by 50.32 percent to reject the activity report of the outgoing leadership. Neither of the two candidates who had until then been considered as Martinez's potential successors, Marie Buisson and Céline Verzeletti, obtained the number of votes needed to replace him at the head of the CGT bureaucracy.

Verzeletti admitted, "It is a disavowal of everything that has been done by the outgoing leadership. This vote is a vote by mandates, which means that the vote of each delegate has been well debated." She added that "this is not a small signal to the outgoing leadership."

In the end, it was Binet who became the first woman to head the CGT. In the union's secretariat, she will be assisted by Laurent Brun of the railworkers' federation, Sébastien Menesplier of the mining and energy federation, and Verzeletti, a former prison guard and leader of the state employees' federation.

Binet is a specialist of gender politics and has excellent contacts in the financial press and academia. In her first speech as CGT leader, Binet said she wanted "clear orientations on feminism, gender equality and the fight against sexist and sexual violence."

About Macron's pension cuts, she said: "We will go, in the all-trade-union alliance, to demand the withdrawal of this reform in a firm, determined way." She claimed that the CGT congress sent "a strong, determined message to the government, employers and Emmanuel Macron: we will not give up! This starts

with our demand for withdrawal of this pension reform. There will be no truce, no suspension, no mediation, we win the withdrawal of the pension reform!”

The CGT bureaucracy is reacting to the explosive political struggle that has erupted against Macron with a significant change in its public image, shifting to the right. Indeed, Binet is not only the first woman, but above all the first CGT secretary who does not have a background as an industrial worker, but in management and academia. Previous CGT secretaries included railway workers (Bernard Thibault) or automobile workers (Philippe Martinez), but Binet leads the federation of managers, which accounts for a little more than 10 percent of the CGT membership.

Binet is a former principal education adviser and vice president of the National Union of Students of France (UNEF) in the 2000s. She participated in UNEF protests against the First Job Contract (CPE) bill in 2006. She is a member of the big-business Socialist Party (PS) and became head of the UGICT in 2018.

Binet has strong ties in the milieu of gender politics and corporate management. In 2019, she co-authored the book *Is the CGT Feminist? Women, their Work and Union Activism*. She publishes her articles not only in the Stalinist newspaper *L’Humanité*, but also in the right-wing financial daily, *Les Echos*.

The choice of Binet does not reflect a fundamental change in the class line of the CGT. Since World War II, it has been dominated by a violently anti-Trotskyist Stalinist bureaucracy. In each great revolutionary struggle in 20th century France—the general strikes of 1936 and May 1968, or the revolutionary struggles that unfolded amid the liberation of Europe from Nazi rule—it did not lead but rather blocked a revolution. However, in order to maintain a political hold over the workers, especially those in industry, the apparatus cultivated a certain very definite image.

The CGT chose as its general secretaries industrial workers who superficially displayed a certain hostility to the bosses and the state, even while negotiating with them behind closed doors. This continued even after the Stalinist bureaucracy dissolved the Soviet Union in 1991.

But over the decades, with repeated betrayals of national strikes in the era of globalized capitalism, the CGT has lost much of its earlier, working class base. Stéphane Sirot, a historian specializing in social

movements, writes: “The CGT is becoming a less industrial organization. When we look at the statistics, technicians and managers are more unionized than employees and workers.” The CGT sees managers as a promising target for unionization drives.

Binet was able to rise to the top of the apparatus thanks to the right-wing evolution of the bureaucracy, and especially to the explosive conflict between the bureaucracy and the rank and file that underlies the current struggle against Macron. The bureaucracy faces a CGT rank and file that is outraged at the pension cuts and at Macron. Some CGT local leaders have led strikes and blockades of industrial sites since the conflict over pensions began. The CGT bureaucracy, on the other hand, seeks to save Macron and betray the strikes.

The Macron government and the bourgeoisie, who are no doubt escalating their “social dialog” with the CGT, are terrified of the eruption of the class struggle. Like the CGT leadership itself, they fear above all that the bureaucracy will lose control over the rank and file. Amid the insurrectionary strikes that erupted across France and Europe immediately after World War II, the CGT expelled from its ranks all the Trotskyists it could identify. Now, with the installation of Binet, forces within the CGT bureaucracy and the state machine are no doubt preparing a new offensive against the rank and file.

The workers will find no alternative but to build their own rank-and-file committees, independent of the union bureaucracy, to wage their struggle against Macron and the diktat of the banks.



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