

LO tacitly backs French unions' call for "mediation" to strangle fight against Macron

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Mass anger is still mounting after three months of mass strikes against President Emmanuel Macron and his attempt to ram through, without a vote, pension cuts opposed by over three-quarters of the French people. Millions of workers and youth have participated in strikes and protests. Two-thirds of the French people support blocking the economy with a general strike to bring down Macron.

This objectively revolutionary situation exposes the class gulf separating the Parti de l'égalité socialiste (PES) from an entire milieu of middle-class, pseudo-left groups like Lutte ouvrière (Workers Struggle, LO). The PES has explained that if Macron is ruling against the people, the only way forward for workers is to initiate a broad political mobilization of the rank and file against Macron. Its goal must be to prepare a general strike to bring down Macron and abolish the French presidency and its draconian powers.

The union bureaucracies and their petty-bourgeois political supporters, such as LO, are working to strangle social opposition against Macron. Last week, union officials called for "mediation" with the state and warned against social anger they fear they cannot control. LO is working to subordinate workers to the union bureaucracies, making no criticisms of union "mediation" plans and avoiding all calls to bring down Macron, while hypocritically acknowledging that union "mediation" with Macron will not stop his cuts.

Indeed, leading LO member Jean-Pierre Mercier recently claimed it would be "naïve" to "think that the government will cancel the law" after the meeting with the union bosses.

Invited on BFM-TV, France's main 24-hour news channel, Mercier said: "Visibly all the trade unions will go to this meeting. In any case, that will not make the mobilization smaller. We just need the cuts withdrawn,

plain and simple. There, no need for negotiations, for mediation! It serves no purpose. Everyone in this country knows what we want, what labour wants. It is the withdrawal, plain and simple, of the law on 64 years."

Mercier's comment covers up the fact that workers' demands extend far beyond just forcing Macron to withdraw the provision of his reform that sets the minimum retirement age at 64. This provision has been chosen as a target by sections of the union bureaucracy, who have indicated that they might accept to sell out the movement if Macron agrees to temporarily abandon this demand. Other parts of Macron's cuts, such as raising the pay-in period to the pension scheme from 40 to 42 years, might remain.

Above all, however, the struggle emerging between the working class and the capitalist police state led by Macron goes far beyond demanding the withdrawal of parts of a law. Growing layers of the working class are concluding that if Macron rules against the people, he must go.

Mercier's claim that the trade union "mediation" will not make the mobilization smaller is a cynical half-truth. It is true that the union "mediation" has no credibility in the working class, where anger and determination to struggle are continuing to mount. But the reality is that LO is firmly oriented to the union bureaucracy, which is terrified of the growing conflict between the working class and the capitalist state.

LO echoes the arguments of factions of the union apparatus which want Macron to have more talks with them, and pass the social cuts more gradually, so as to wear the workers down and impose the will of the banks without provoking a social explosion.

Last week, the union tops called for "mediation" with Macron while expressing their deep concern about the

rising social anger. French Democratic Labor Confederation (CFDT) leader Laurent Berger called for a stand-down of the strike movement. “I am concerned by this situation.” He warned of “a political climate that is dangerous” and “insanity that could take over this country,” concluding: “We have to turn the temperature down, not stoke things up.”

Berger warned that if the capitalist state and the union bureaucracies simply agreed to publicly support the law and end all legal protest against it, the results could be catastrophic for them. 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.” In order to avert the complete discrediting of the state institutions and the union bureaucracies, Berger proposed his bogus “mediation” with Macron.

Berger’s comment reflects enormous concern among the unions’ apparatus, that the class struggle threatens their privileged position within the capitalist political establishment. This concern is shared by the privileged union bureaucrats and academics who set the political line of LO.

LO opposes any struggles developing independently outside the control of the pro-capitalist union bureaucracy, and towards a general strike to bring down Macron. On March 29, LO published a statement titled, “Continue the struggle, in force and with determination!” by LO spokeswoman Nathalie Arthaud. The LO statement did not make any criticism of, or indeed even mention, the unions’ call for “mediation” with Macron.

The most important thing to remember, it states, is that “the feeling of injustice and anger is rising in the world of labor. That is why ever more workers are joining in the protests and opposing the ferociously anti-worker policy of the government and of big business.”

LO peddles the illusion that spontaneous strikes can pressure Macron to modify the reform, while leaving his regime intact. Arthaud wrote, “It is strike action that can give us power to make Macron fold.”

Arthaud’s empty talk of making Macron “fold” has the advantage, for LO, that no one knows what this means. While sounding “militant,” it in fact commits LO to nothing. The strikes she vaguely proposed would be compatible with the union apparatus organizing a few one-day strikes to isolate workers’ struggles plant by plant, while letting the state repress strikes and

requisition strikers to legally compel them to return to work.

Even as it boasts about making Macron “fold,” LO advances the demoralized argument that it is in fact very difficult to fight capitalism, because the capitalist state is so strong. Thus, the working class in this view can only pressure the state to modify its policies through symbolic protests controlled by the union bureaucracies.

Indeed, the LO statement concludes: “So the struggle is on, it must be waged to the end. The fight will not be easy, because the bourgeoisie, even though it is super rich, is determined not to give an inch. So, yes, the bourgeoisie and Macron do not want to give an inch. Well then, it is up to us to show we are just as determined in the fight!”

The perspective advanced by LO is bankrupt. If it is impossible currently to launch a general strike, despite the support of a large majority of workers for such a strike, it is mainly because of the bankruptcy and political cowardice of such pseudo-left organizations. The mobilization of the working class in struggle against Macron depends on politically arming the working class to thrust aside the vague, demoralizing rhetoric of groups like LO.

The PES makes clear: the working class must be mobilized to bring down Macron. It proposes to convene general assemblies in every workplace and school, to adopt resolutions demanding that Macron be removed from power, and that a general strike against his regime be prepared. These assemblies can select committees, drawn from the rank and file and democratically answerable to them, to lead and broaden this political struggle.

The creation of such independent working class organs of struggle would pave the way for the transfer of power to institutions democratically controlled by the working class and the fight to build a socialist society.



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