

Lambertistes seek to strangle fight against Macron's pension cuts

French pseudo-left POID calls for bourgeois government of national unity

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In 1971, the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) split with what was then its French section, Pierre Lambert's *Organisation communiste internationaliste*. The OCI oriented to the Union of the Left between the big business Socialist Party (PS) and the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF). In 1981, it backed the election of PS President François Mitterrand, endorsing him on the first round. A year after his election, Mitterrand carried out his "austerity turn," slashing living standards and jobs.

The significance of this emerges clearly today, as explosive working class struggles erupt against former PS economy minister, now President Emmanuel Macron. Macron is ruling against the people, ramming through his overwhelmingly unpopular pension cuts without a vote in parliament, and facing a mass strike movement. The *Parti de l'égalité socialiste*, the French section built by the ICFI in 2016, calls for workers to build independent rank-and-file committees to prepare a general strike to bring down Macron.

The *Parti ouvrier indépendant démocratique* (POID, Democratic Independent Workers Party), which descends from Lambert's OCI, pursues a diametrically opposite policy. While it also calls for a "general strike" against Macron, because this proposal has overwhelming popular support, it sees this as a stepping stone to building a new capitalist government. It proposes to replace Macron by a bourgeois government of national unity, offering friendly advice to pseudo-left politician Jean-Luc Mélenchon, himself an ex-Lambertist. The POID writes:

Since January, the all-trade union alliance has won the confidence of workers and youth by calling for struggle until the cuts are withdrawn. If it wants to keep this confidence, it must call the entire country for a general strike until the cuts are withdrawn. This is the only way to respond to the government's contempt for the people and force it to step back.

As for Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who is asking Macron to dissolve the National Assembly or hold a referendum, he must realize: the solution will not come from Macron.

The duty of parties that claim to defend the cause of the workers and democracy is to call clearly for Macron's departure, right now, immediately, and to proclaim that they are ready to constitute an emergency government that makes a break and abrogates the pension cuts.

This is a fraud. The PES irreconcilably opposes all attempts to cobble

together an "emergency" bourgeois government to replace Macron, as proposed by the POID. If the POID, Mélenchon or other establishment parties somehow assembled such a government, the PES would oppose it and seek to politically mobilize the working class against it.

What the POID is proposing is to build a reactionary capitalist government that would directly clash with the movement of the working class. Indeed, the working class is now engaged in a struggle against the capitalist state itself. The PES explains that the bringing down of Macron in a general strike would be a critical first step in a broader struggle. It would mobilize the power of the working class independently of the union bureaucracies, setting the stage for a struggle of the working class for state power and to build socialism.

The POID, in contrast, intends for France's corrupt union bureaucracies to keep control of the struggles of the working class and subordinate them to their negotiations with the capitalist state. Over three months of mass strikes, the bureaucracies have made clear that they have no intention of mobilizing the working class for a general strike to bring down Macron. Indeed, led by CFDT union boss Laurent Berger, they demanded "mediation" with Macron and warned of "violence" by protesters as protests were attacked by riot police.

The POID's pleas to the union bosses to organize a general strike have a thoroughly empty, ritualistic character. The POID could, to be sure, use its considerable weight inside the union bureaucracy to launch a substantial campaign for mass strike action, if this was its policy. But it has no intention to organize a rank-and-file rebellion against the union leaders, preferring to issue impotent and useless appeals to them to launch a general strike.

By demanding that bureaucracies launch general strikes that they oppose and will not launch, the POID is not trying to initiate a struggle, but to promote illusions in the bureaucrats. This also lets POID members in the union bureaucracy posture in front of the rank-and-file as "militant" advocates of general strike action, when in reality they are taking no action to bring about a general strike. It is a cynical cover for inaction and political cowardice.

Indeed, for that reason the POID constantly in all its party statements poses as advisers of the union bureaucracy, appealing to them to take action. In another party statement, the POID declared: "Everything is concentrated in the responsibility of the leaders of the trade union confederations to call without delay for a general strike to force Macron and his minority government to back down."

If for the POID, "everything is concentrated" in the actions of the bureaucracy, this is because it is a petty-bourgeois, anti-Trotskyist tendency, oriented not to rank-and-file workers but to the union bureaucracy, Mélenchon and their maneuvers with the ruling establishment. Against the POID, the PES bases itself on Trotsky's

critique of the POID's political ancestors in the Stalinist and social-democratic labor bureaucracy, who built the Popular Front alliance with the liberal bourgeoisie in the 1930s.

In 1935, Leon Trotsky exposed the Popular Front, which betrayed the May-June 1936 general strike in France, blocking a revolutionary struggle of the working class for power. Against the union bureaucracies linked to the social-democratic and Stalinist parties, he called for the building of rank-and-file committees of action. His essay "For Committees of Action—Not the People's Front" in his work *Whither France* responds to the POID's anti-Trotskyist line today.

Trotsky condemned the politics of petty-bourgeois forces who, behind "revolutionary" rhetoric, "consider the 'unity' of these apparatuses as an absolute 'good' which stands above the interests of the revolutionary struggle." Building committees of action, Trotsky wrote, is "the only means of breaking the anti-revolutionary opposition of the party and trade union apparatuses." On the other hand, political supporters of the bureaucracies, Trotsky wrote,

serve to shield this apparatus from the indignation of the masses. The situation can be saved only by aiding the struggling masses to create a new apparatus, in the process of the struggle itself, which meets the requirements of the moment. The committees of action are intended for this very purpose ... Such tasks as the creation of workers' militia, the arming of the workers, the preparation of a general strike, will remain on paper if the struggling masses themselves through their authoritative organs do not occupy themselves with these tasks.

The POID rejects a Trotskyist perspective, orienting to the union bureaucracies and bourgeois parties. However, it tries to cover its counterrevolutionary policy behind claims that it is fighting for a workers government like the 1871 Paris Commune. It writes:

The first workers government in history, the Paris Commune, in less than 100 days, lay the basis of an authentic social and political democracy founded on the equality of rights.

We are fighting for a workers government that will have the audacity to confiscate the hundreds of billions of euros in speculation, the hundreds of billions in war budgets to spend them on urgent needs: to hospitals, schools, public services, to the general raising of wages and the protection of everyone's pensions in the conditions in which they were acquired.

The POID's claim that it is inspired by the model of the Paris Commune is another fraud. The Paris workers in 1871 took power not under the control of union bureaucracies, but in an uprising against the Third Republic, forming their own independent organs of state power. It was not just another municipal government in France, but an independent body of the working class diametrically opposed to the bourgeois Third Republic, which ultimately responded by slaughtering the Commune in the Bloody Week of May 21-28, 1871.

The experience of the Paris Commune showed, as Marx famously stated in an address to the International Workingmen's Association, that "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes."

The POID, on the other hand, intends for workers struggles to remain under the control of union bureaucracies negotiating with Macron. It is not

proposing to build independent organs of working class struggle that could evolve into organs of workers power, but looking for allies to form a bourgeois coalition government functioning within the capitalist state machine. Such a capitalist government will not expropriate the ill-gotten wealth of the financial oligarchy, as many bitter experiences of the working class attest.

The POID's rhetoric today echoes the OCI's propaganda in support of the 1981 PS-PCF coalition government in France.

The record of the 1981 Mitterrand government was not of revolution, however, but austerity at home and imperialist war abroad. After the 1982-1983 "austerity turn," Mitterrand sent troops to Chad for a covert war on Libya. In his second term, he ordered French troops to participate in the first Gulf War against Iraq. The French government also played a central role in the Rwandan genocide of 1994, backing the Hutu-led government and helping the Hutu-extremist militias involved in the genocide escape eastward into the Congo.

Today, the POID no doubt intends for workers to read its statements as appeals to Mélenchon to ally with the POID to build a new government. Mélenchon himself has impotently called on Macron to hold new elections, which—though Macron has given no indication that he will take this suggestion—could theoretically return a greater number of parliamentarians from Mélenchon's Unsubmissive France (LFI) party. Mélenchon could then try to serve, as he already has repeatedly proposed to do, under Macron as prime minister.

A POID-backed government would not however be simply a replay of the Mitterrand government of the 1980s, as reactionary as it proved to be. After decades of economic globalization, war and deepening social inequality, with Europe now plunged in a NATO-Russia war in Ukraine, it would be far to the right of that. The experience of governments led by Mélenchon allies, like Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain, must be taken as a warning on the nature of a hypothetical "government of national unity" supported by the POID.

In 2015, Syriza allied with the far-right Independent Greeks party, repudiated its election promises to end EU austerity, and again slashed pensions and living standards. It went on to build EU detention camps for refugees and send weapons to Saudi Arabia for its war on Yemen. The Syriza government collapsed in disgrace, bringing to power a right-wing, pro-EU government of the discredited New Democracy party.

Podemos now rules Spain in alliance with the big-business Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE). It has fully participated in the NATO war in Ukraine, arming the neo-Nazi Azov Battalion, and brutally attacked strikes from workers demanding scientific protection during the initial wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. It has ruthlessly cracked down on truckers' and steelworkers' strikes, and is currently passing its own pension cuts echoing those of Macron.

The PES warns against any attempt to lead workers into the political trap of appeals to the union bureaucracy, or for the formation of a new capitalist government. It explains that the struggle against Macron can only proceed by a rebellion of the working class against the bureaucracies backed by the POID, as workers build their own rank-and-file organizations to prepare a general strike to bring down Macron.

In this struggle, the party fighting to build the Trotskyist revolutionary leadership of the working class is the PES, not the pro-capitalist operatives leading the Lambertist POID.



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