

900,000 people demonstrate against Macron as the union apparatuses try to strangle the fight

Our reporters
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Yesterday, 900,000 people demonstrated for a 14th day of action against Emmanuel Macron's pension reform. It was the first day of action since May 1, after six weeks during which the trade union confederations did not organize a single mobilization against the reform, though it is rejected by three-quarters of the French people and an overwhelming majority of workers.

The numbers of marchers was down compared to the mobilization of May 1, when more than 2 million participated, let alone the more than 3 million who took to the streets in March when Macron imposed his reform without a vote in the Assembly. This does not reflect a change in the opinion of workers towards this illegitimate reform. But the union bureaucracies and their political allies oppose a struggle to bring down Macron, and masses of people increasingly feel that these mobilizations, in their current form, are heading for defeat.

The Socialist Equality Party (PES) insisted on the importance of drawing the essential lessons from this struggle, the largest mobilization of the working class in France since the May 1968 general strike. The struggle against the pension cuts is a political struggle against the capitalist state, and to wage it, workers have to fight to bring down Macron. This requires organizing the rank and file in action committees to wage the struggle independently of the union bureaucracies, which are complicit with Macron and the police state.

The union leaderships and the pseudo-left, on the other hand, are doing everything possible to strangle the struggle and not only allow Macron's illegitimate law to remain in place, but enable the French bourgeoisie to use this money to escalate the NATO war against Russia.

Laurent Berger, the head of the French Democratic Labor Confederation (CFDT) bureaucracy, insisted that the CFDT intends to end the struggle. "The match over pensions is over, whether we like it or not," Berger said on BFM-TV. "This is the last demonstration against the pension reform in

this format [of mass march], we're not going to tell any more stories ... But there is still anger and resentment."

Sophie Binet, the leader of the General Confederation of Labor (CGT) bureaucracy, proclaimed unity with Berger, while claiming to support possible subsequent protests. "For six months the inter-union [coalition] has been holding on and it will hold on," she said, before adding: "What is certain is that it will continue."

The Unsubmissive France (LFI) party supports the trade union campaign to stifle the struggle. "The fight will continue," said LFI leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon, adding that "we don't know in what form." Indeed, Mélenchon made it clear that LFI seeks to "continue" the struggle not by mobilizing workers, but by collaborating more closely with union bureaucracies.

"One way or another, this fight will find its continuation. ... The game is not up," Mélenchon said. "I would prefer a broader organization where the unions agree to collaborate with the political organizations."

However, the whole experience of the struggles of millions of workers and young people against Macron demonstrates that a class gulf separates the union leaderships and the pseudo-left parties from the masses of workers and young people mobilized against Macron. While masses of workers and young people still reject the pension cut and the government, the ruling circles want to stop the movement against Macron.

At the protest in Paris, WSWs journalists interviewed Jérôme Fichet, a CGT delegate at engine maker Safran in the Le Havre region, who recalled the struggle of workers in refineries and industrial zones in the region against the pension cut.

He said, "We blocked the industrial zone, we did a lot of damage to Le Havre's economy. We came here to make contacts in Paris, to stir things up a bit. We find that it is needed. Everyone needs to come together and get motivated to be stronger. The government is only dividing people, we

must not get into that game. We must show the strength of the workers and say no, everyone knows that there are more than 50, 60, 70 percent of employees and even non-employees who are against this reform.”

He added: “Legitimacy is not with the government, it is with the people. They butter us up a bit during the election, and then they say, ‘Shut up, even if you’re 3 million on the street, it’s we who decide.’ But no, that’s not how it works.”

Pointing to the police repression of the strike pickets and the fascistic character of the government and Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin, a sympathizer of the ultra-right *Action Française*, Jérôme said: “We have to regroup and make the government see that we don’t agree with this totalitarian regime. ... When Action Française demonstrated, they said, ‘Darmanin come back, we need you.’ They have fascist sympathies.”

Asked about Macron’s military spending with money taken from pensions and NATO support for neo-Nazi militias in Ukraine, Fichet said: “We hear a lot about developments with the internet and I’m not saying it’s not good. But we are fixed on that. We talk about artificial intelligence, but where is our own intelligence, looking at history and not making the same mistakes as before? Because everything that happened in 1939-1940 is happening there. They are reopening the path to the far right.”

The WSWs also interviewed two high school students, Judith and Lisa, who came to speak out against the pension cuts and Macron.

Judith expressed her lack of confidence in the union bureaucracies’ policy of negotiating with Macron: “Macron does not listen, he does as he pleases. The majority of French people are against him, but he doesn’t want to hear anything. So they can always try to negotiate, it will always be façade. For him, he can then say, ‘Yes, we tried to negotiate and that’s how it is.’ But I don’t think that will change anything.”

About the Military Programming Law, Lisa added: “Above all, we don’t want the money that was supposed to go to our parents after they worked for all their careers to be put into the war. It’s really unfair. We, at the base, we are not part of this war. We do not want all this money to be reinvested in the war.”

Antoine, who also studies at Lycée Rodin in Paris and is a member of LFI youth, also spoke to WSWs journalists.

While emphasizing his opposition to the pension reform, Antoine repeated LFI’s criticism of the opposition of the PES and the WSWs to the increase in the French military budget and to the NATO war in Ukraine. He said: “For pensions, I would not get the money from the army but from

tax evasion. The Military Programming Law is very important for France’s international position. Like pensions, it is also very important.”

He explained LFI’s arguments to defend Macron’s foreign policy: “What I want is for there to be the voice of independent France, not the voice of France behind the United States. If Emmanuel Macron increases the army budget in order to have a strong and independent army, then that is fine. But if it’s just to provide boxes of ammunition to Kyiv so that they can fight with the Russians, then it’s not.”

However, Antoine also confessed that his comrades do not know how to defend workers and democratic rights against Macron and the police state. He said, “We don’t know what to do to have something democratic, because he’s not going to let go. This is a real problem. ... After monstrous and record demonstrations, three and a half million people in the streets, blocked high schools, huge processions, huge demonstrations, he did not back down, which is very problematic for democracy.”

In reality, to develop a movement against pension reform and the police state led by Macron, it is necessary to break with the nationalist and reactionary perspective of strengthening French imperialism, whether or not it is “independent” of Washington. The NATO war against Russia on the outside and the class war on the workers on the inside are two sides of the same coin. To fight against one, one must also oppose the other, and the political forces of the pseudo-left that strangle the struggles against both.

The fight to defend the democratic and social rights of workers now requires, as the PES insists, the formation of rank-and-file committees to organize workers’ struggles against capitalist governments across Europe that are waging austerity and war. The fight against pension reform requires building the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees and an international anti-war movement in the working class.



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