

Which way forward for the struggle against France's Macron-Attal government?

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Since President Emmanuel Macron named Gabriel Attal to head a new French government last month, the working class has begun to again move into struggle. The recent teachers strike and calls for transport strikes are initial tremors presaging a broader eruption of the class struggle in France and internationally. They unfold amid an international wave of mass protests against the Israeli regime's genocide in Gaza, backed by Macron and other top NATO officials.

Working class anger is mounting at a surge in capitalist exploitation that is leading to a historic collapse in living standards. Europe's capitalist oligarchy is diverting trillions of euros into bank bailouts and military spending increases amid the escalating NATO-Russia war in Ukraine. While France's billionaires increase their net worth by hundreds of billions each year, food prices are up 20 percent and energy 30 percent since 2021 and wages are stagnating.

This emerging objectively revolutionary situation poses urgent questions of perspective. Workers do not face trade union struggles that can be waged within a national framework, but an international political struggle against capitalism's plunge into war and fascist reaction. The decisive question is the construction of an international revolutionary leadership fighting to bring down capitalism, bring the working class to power, and build socialism.

France provides many examples that without such a leadership, not even the most militant movement can reverse the onslaught against the working class. It has seen nearly a decade of explosive struggles: against the Socialist Party (PS) labor law in 2016, the 2018-2019 "yellow vest" protests, against Macron's back-to-work orders in the COVID-19 pandemic. Last year saw the largest mass strikes in France since 1936 and 1968

erupt against Macron's use of emergency powers to impose overwhelmingly unpopular pension cuts without a vote in parliament.

Yet the explosion from below did not shift the reactionary course of the ruling elite, which responded by shifting not to the left, but to the right. This is epitomized in Macron's installation of Attal, a move transparently designed to pursue policies of war and fascist reaction virtually indistinguishable from those of Marine Le Pen's neo-fascist National Rally (RN).

In December, Macron's party voted to approve an anti-immigration law repudiating the principle of birthright citizenship and threatening non-citizens' access to medical care, a move Le Pen hailed as an "ideological victory" for the far right. Attal, once in office, pledged attacks on unemployment insurance and minimum wage laws. He will also further strengthen France's massive police forces and ban Muslim clothing and implement "patriotic" education in public schools.

Finally, as top British officers demands that the British people prepare for mass conscription to wage total war on Russia, Attal plans to implement mandatory Universal National Service (SNU) on French youth, coordinated by the French army.

The bourgeoisie's commanding staff announces openly that the new government aims to plant neo-fascism at the center of public life. Attal's nomination, *Le Monde* wrote, "ends the hope of marginalizing the RN ... On the contrary, it signals a decision to 'challenge' Le Pen based not on moral principles that have become inoperative, but on its capacity to bring a serious solution to the problems to which she points."

Why does the French bourgeoisie's paper of record assert that principled objections to the legacy of fascism are "inoperative?" It is bound up in the final

analysis with imperialism's genocidal policies today. Neo-fascism's historical defense of the Holocaust, the war of annihilation on the Soviet Union, and French collaboration with Nazism is essential to a ruling class that supports genocide in Gaza, the plunge into a new world war with Russia, and fascist reaction at home.

There is widespread opposition to the Macron-Attal government: less than a month after his nomination, Attal's poll ratings have fallen to 32 percent. But there is no path forward for working class opposition within an electoral-parliamentary framework. The electoral alternative the ruling class, major bourgeois media and the political establishment are grooming for power is the neo-fascist Le Pen, who exploits social grievances and appeals to anti-Muslim racism while profiting from the entire bourgeoisie's neo-fascistic orientation.

A new revolutionary leadership must be built in the working class. Macron's fascistic evolution exposes the bankruptcy of tendencies based on the traditions of Popular Front alliances with the liberal bourgeoisie. This includes not only Stalinist and social-democratic parties, but the middle class descendants of renegades from Trotskyism who split with the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) to orient to the Stalinist or social-democratic bureaucracies.

A revolutionary leadership must be built based on the ICFI's defense of the traditions of the October Revolution and of Trotskyism. This emerges from a review of the role of the union bureaucracy and its political allies in last year's pension struggle in France. As strikes and protests grew over several months, and particularly after protests erupted against Macron's decision to ram through his cuts without even the fig leaf of a vote in parliament, these tendencies shrank back in fear of events.

Polls found that two-thirds of the French people wanted to block the economy and bring down Macron in a general strike, but the heads of the social-democratic and Stalinist union confederations said the protests threatened unacceptable violence and had to be brought to a close. As riot police assaulted strikers and youth, the bureaucracies worked to demobilize opposition and finally called an end to all strikes against Macron. This let the pension cuts pass despite the opposition of the overwhelming majority of the French people.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon of the France Unbowed (LFI)

received 8 million votes in the 2022 presidential elections. LFI made no appeal, however, to mobilize its voters to prepare the general strike desired by the people. Like other pseudo-left groups—the Pabloite New Anti-capitalist Party, the Morenoite *Révolution permanente*, and Lambertiste Independent Democratic Workers Party (POID)—it said the situation was not revolutionary. This milieu limited itself to appeals to Macron to see reason, or to appeals to the unions to pursue a popular, militant policy.

The *Parti de l'égalité socialiste* (PES), the French section of the ICFI, was alone in fighting to build a political movement against Macron. It called on workers and youth to adopt resolutions in their workplaces and schools calling to bring down Macron, explaining that this was a necessary first step in a struggle for workers power and socialism. Macron's adoption of neo-fascist policies and his declarations of friendship with the Zionist regime amid genocide in Gaza vindicate this position.

Broad sections of the French working class know Macron rules against the people. There is still, however, a gulf separating the objectively revolutionary situation from the political consciousness of broad masses of workers. This is bound up with the domination over workers struggles exercised by national union bureaucracies and pseudo-left parties of the affluent middle class, who seek to cut workers' struggles off from those of their class brothers and sisters internationally and tie them to the capitalist state.

The critical task, in France and internationally, remains the struggle for Marxist revolutionary consciousness in the working class. The only way forward is to saturate the working class with consciousness of the necessity for the international unification of its struggles into a struggle for power and for the implementation of socialist policies. This requires building the PES in France and sections of the ICFI in countries around the world.



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