

The class struggle in France and the fight against war

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The following speech was given by Alex Lantier, the national secretary of the Parti de l'Égalité Socialiste (PES) in France, at the International May Day 2024 Online Rally, held Saturday, May 4.

I bring the fraternal greetings of the *Parti de l'égalité socialiste* of France to this international online May Day, the day of international proletarian unity. In 2024, the workers of Europe and of the world are faced with the task of unifying in struggle to stop an emerging Third World War.

In February, at a European summit in Paris, French President Emmanuel Macron threatened to send French troops to Ukraine to fight Russia. The NATO imperialist powers' aggressive role stands exposed. They are threatening not only the Russian people, but also the international proletariat, with war between nuclear powers.

Macron and his NATO allies are escalating their war in defiance of the will of the peoples of Europe. Polls show 68 percent of the French, 80 percent of Germans and 90 percent of Poles reject sending troops to Ukraine. However, mass media in France and across Europe are calling to build a "war industry" to wage "high-intensity conflicts" such as the current war in Ukraine.

As at the beginning of the world wars in 1914 and 1939, the capitalist system is in a mortal crisis. Faced with international and social conflicts for which they have no solution, the ruling classes are consciously heading towards a disaster they do not know how to stop.

In 2019, Macron told the British magazine *The Economist* that NATO was "brain-dead" because it was risking war with Russia over Syria. In 2017, he had invited Russian President Vladimir Putin to the royal palace at Versailles for cordial discussions. But now

Macron, as brain-dead as the rest of NATO, aspires to play the role of Europe's leading warmonger.

The NATO powers' support for the Zionist regime's genocide in Gaza unmasks Macron and his allies. Paris has sold several hundred million euros' worth of weapons to Israel since 2012. Last autumn, as Israeli troops bombed defenseless civilians in Gaza, Macron traveled to Israel to embrace Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whom Macron called his "friend."

By encouraging the mass murder of tens of thousands of Gaza civilians in hospitals and detention camps, NATO is not only targeting the Palestinian people. Its targets go beyond Lebanon, Syria and Iran, which Israel is also bombing. The imperialist powers are declaring war on the rest of the world and, above all, on the international working class.

Paris is especially furious at the movement of African workers and rural masses that forced it to withdraw its troops from the Sahel. Military dictatorships in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, giving way to the explosion of popular anger, asked French troops to leave their countries. They invited into their countries Russian troops of the Wagner militia for protection against threats of an invasion by African governments allied to France.

French and European capital, whose investments still dominate African finance, do not plan to leave Africa to Russian troops or Chinese consumer goods. If Macron is threatening Moscow, this is because French banks dream of unrestrained plunder not only of the natural resources of Russia, but also of their former colonial empire in Africa.

The workers can halt the military escalation and stop the world war before it destroys humanity. All together, they can block the delivery of weapons to Israel that

make possible the genocide in Gaza. But for this, they will have to build a movement that is not national, aiming to convince presidents in each country to change their diplomacy, but international—mobilizing the power of the working class of all countries against war, genocide and capitalism.

Critical political lessons flow from the recent experiences of the class struggle, like the movement in France last year against Macron’s pension cuts.

Ruling openly against the people, Macron imposed his cuts to free up tens of billions of euros for the military budget. Three-quarters of the French people opposed the cuts, but he rammed them through the parliament without a vote. He sent riot police to assault protesters and strikers, and even bystanders, preparing world war abroad by waging class war at home.

The working class wanted to struggle, but Macron relied on the union bureaucracies and their political allies to stifle the movement. Sixty percent of the French people said they supported blocking the economy with a general strike, but the union bosses saved Macron. Fearing what they called “the insanity that could take over this country, with violence but also very deep social resentment,” they called off further protests.

In reality, the madness of contemporary society comes not from working class anger, but the irrationality of capitalism. By strangling the movement against Macron, the union executives opened the path for Macron to escalate the war.

The decisive question posed by the experience of this movement is: What is the Trotskyist tendency, that is, the revolutionary alternative both to capitalism and Stalinism? It is the International Committee of the Fourth International, and, in France, the PES. During the movement against the pension cuts, the PES called to mobilize the working class to bring down Macron and his police state as the first stage in a struggle for socialism.

What was the line of the descendants of the Pabloites who split with the ICFI in 1953, arguing that Stalinist bureaucracies would give the workers revolutionary leadership?

“The situation is not revolutionary,” wrote *Révolution permanente*, the Morenoite faction of the French Pabloite movement. It called to build “an authentic counterweight to the power of the bourgeoisie,” that is,

inside capitalist society.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s New Popular Union sent a delegation of Stalinist parliamentarians to deliver a letter criticizing the cuts to the Elysée presidential palace. This impotent gesture reflects the reactionary political pessimism of Mélenchon. After receiving 8 million votes in the 2022 presidential elections, he has made no revolutionary appeal to his voters. He, in fact, said he was willing to serve as prime minister under either Macron or a neo-fascist president.

What is the strategic alternative to these politically corrupt forces who subordinate the working class to capitalism and war? A year before the eruption of the 1936 French general strike, against Stalinists who argued that the situation was not revolutionary, Trotsky wrote:

The situation is revolutionary, as revolutionary as it can be, granted the non-revolutionary policies of the working-class parties. More exactly, the situation is pre-revolutionary. In order to bring the situation to its full maturity, there must be an immediate, vigorous, unremitting mobilization of the masses, under the slogan of the conquest of power in the name of socialism. ...

At the present time, all that the pious mouthings of the phrase ‘non-revolutionary situation’ can do is to crush the minds of the workers, paralyse their will and hand them over to the class enemy.

This analysis, nine decades later, still illuminates the objectively revolutionary situation today: it is the path to follow to mobilize workers internationally in struggle against genocide and war.



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