

# Prepare a general strike, bring down Macron, halt the war escalation in Europe!

**Parti de l'égalité socialiste (France)**

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By calling a vote of confidence on his austerity budget, French Prime Minister François Bayrou has blown the lid off the political crisis in France and across Europe. With his minority government set to fall, and no clear winner expected if new legislative elections are called, France is in deadlock.

An irreconcilable conflict is emerging between the working class and the capitalist oligarchy's funding of its war course through deep austerity. As German Chancellor Friedrich Merz prepares a €1 trillion war fund and declares, "The welfare state can no longer be financed," Bayrou is calling to cut vacation days and €44 billion in social spending to prepare to triple French military spending. These policies of austerity and militarization, pursued across Europe, face overwhelming popular opposition.

Polls show 84 percent of France's population oppose Bayrou's budget. Over two-thirds want the removal of both Bayrou and French President Emmanuel Macron, the president of the rich. Work stoppages are being prepared by energy and rail workers, supermarket workers, taxi drivers, and pharmacists, and there are growing calls to block the economy with a one-day nationwide protest strike on September 10.

The political situation is pregnant with the possibility of a general strike like that of May 1968 in France. But such an eruption of the class struggle, for which a one-day national protest strike in France would only be a rehearsal, must be fought for. The working class must be politically armed with an understanding of its tasks in the emerging international struggle, and overcome the obstacle posed by bureaucracies that seek to delay and disorganize the class struggle.

In France, these are above all the New Popular Front (NFP) coalition led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon's France Unbowed (LFI) party, the big-business Socialist Party (PS), the Greens, and the Stalinist PCF. The union bureaucracies reject calls to block the economy: the CFDT called them "not our method" and the CGT dismissed them as "nebulous." Mélenchon calls for a one-day "general blockage" on September 10, "because on September 23, we will table a censure motion" in parliament, hoping to force Macron to resign.

But there will be no national solution to this crisis, and workers must oppose petty-bourgeois parties like LFI trying to subordinate the class struggle to their parliamentary maneuvers. The task facing the workers is not to elect a new capitalist government, but to take power out of the hands of a capitalist oligarchy plunging head first into war, genocide, and dictatorship.

**Class roots of the French budget crisis**

Workers cannot resolve the French budget crisis by electing a new capitalist government. Such a government would inevitably seek to continue the broad outline of Bayrou's policies. Workers face two stark alternatives: stop the wars and the military build-up via a direct assault on capitalist property, or be plunged into poverty.

Bayrou's cuts aim to finance the rise in defense spending to 5 percent of GDP that Europe's NATO powers agreed with Washington amid the NATO-Russia war in Ukraine and the Gaza genocide. It aims to free up €100 billion per year for the army, while slashing state budgets to reassure the banks that France's public debt can be paid off.

Workers are not responsible for these debts. Since the 2008 Wall Street crash, France's debt has mushroomed from 68 to 115 percent of GDP. Of this 47 percent of GDP rise in the debt, two-thirds came as France financed just two of the euro zone's many bank bailouts: in 2009, after the Wall Street crash, and in 2020, to halt the financial panic as the COVID-19 pandemic began.

Euro zone states borrowed money from the European Central Bank and gave it to their banks to prop up stock and debt markets and bloat the wealth of the oligarchy. Since 2009, industry and living standards have stagnated. Yet the wealth of just the top 500 French people, as recorded by *Challenges* magazine, exploded after each bank bailout, rising more than sixfold since 2009 from €194 to €1,228 billion. This obscene wealth has become incompatible with democracy.

Of the French state's €445 billion operating budget, 25 percent goes to pensions, 20 percent to health care, 15 percent to education and other administrations, and 11 percent to unemployment insurance and family benefits, according to the Elysée presidential palace. With France's revenues for its operating budget at €330 billion, it runs a massive budget deficit that the banks threaten not to finance.

With 71 percent of France's operating budget going to basic services, the only way to find €100 billion for the war machine, and another €100 billion to cut the deficit, is to destroy the welfare state. This also means setting up a police state dictatorship to smash social opposition. Conversely, to defend social and democratic rights, the working class must stop the war and smash the diktat of the capitalist oligarchy.

## What way forward for the working class?

Political lessons must be drawn from the struggles of recent years. In the 2023 pension struggle, millions went on strike and riots erupted

against Macron's cuts—only to see unions call off strikes after Macron promulgated his cuts by decree. In 2024, millions voted for Mélenchon and the NFP, which came in first in the legislative elections, only to see Mélenchon endorse Macron's candidates on the second round, letting Macron keep power via a series of weak, minority governments.

One central lesson is: the class struggle must be freed from the deadening grip of the NFP bureaucracies and the nationalist perspective underlying Mélenchon's parliamentary maneuvers.

To this end, workers must build rank-and-file organizations, independent of the union bureaucracies and their "social dialog" with the state, to coordinate and organize their struggles. An enormous growth of the class struggle is essential to create conditions in which a general strike and an international struggle against capitalism and imperialist war can emerge.

The working class needs its own demands around which it can mount such a political offensive. The Parti de l'égalité socialiste advances for this purpose the following demands:

#### **No to imperialist war! Stop war with Russia, dismantle NATO! End the military build-up!**

Plans for NATO war against Russia, rejected by the overwhelming majority of the people, must be stopped. Workers must demand France leave the imperialist NATO alliance, which threatens to trigger nuclear war, as part of an international struggle of the working class to dismantle NATO and stop its wars. Not a penny should go to military spending increases to prepare for "high intensity war," that is, for mass slaughter like that which has cost hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian and Russian lives.

#### **Stop the Gaza genocide! No persecution of opponents of genocide!**

Workers in France and internationally must block the production and delivery of arms to the Israeli regime for the Gaza genocide. The prosecution of opponents of the Gaza genocide on bogus anti-terrorism or antisemitism charges must end. Israeli officials responsible for the genocide, as well as French and NATO officials who help arm it or are complicit in it, must be prosecuted.

#### **Bring down Macron, abolish the Fifth Republic's executive presidency!**

Macron rules against the people by police repression and mass arrests of strikers and protesters. He must be removed by the working class, but his replacement by another capitalist politician would not stop the attacks on democratic rights. The executive presidency of France's 1958 constitution, the nerve center of police-state repression and plots against democracy, must be abolished.

#### **Stop the persecution of refugees and immigrants, for the international unity of the working class!**

A struggle for socialist revolution is inseparable from the struggle for the international unity of the working class. Workers must oppose the persecution of immigrants, the setting up of mass detention camps for refugees, and humiliating laws like those banning Muslim clothing in French schools. This is essential to overcoming attempts by the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeois bureaucracies to divide workers along national lines and thus block a European struggle against war and capitalism.

#### **Impound public bailout funds, expropriate the capitalist oligarchy!**

Workers must reject the lie that there is no money for social programs and jobs. The trillions of euros of public funds monopolized by the capitalist oligarchy in France and across Europe must be impounded, and used to fund jobs and social programs. This requires a struggle by the working class to expropriate the oligarchy and turn Europe's major enterprises into a network of public utilities, serving the interests of the people.

#### **For the United Socialist States of Europe**

Workers and youth in France have powerful allies in the millions of workers across Europe and internationally opposed to war, fascism, genocide and austerity. Bureaucrats and parliamentarians will stand in the way. Workers must build their own rank-and-file organizations of struggle and a political movement to transfer power to the working class in France, across Europe and internationally, replacing the capitalist European Union with the United Socialist States of Europe.



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