

Build committees of action! Mobilize workers against war, in defense of France's youth movement!

Parti de l'égalité socialiste
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Nearly half a million youth and workers marched against austerity and militarism on the October 6 day of action in France, as high school protests entered their third week. Amid mass protests in more than 50 Spanish cities against evictions and unaffordable housing, public sector strikes in Portugal, and youth protests in Belgium and Germany, the scope of events is clear. A European mass movement is colliding with the police state and the diktat of the capitalist oligarchy.

In France, hundreds of high schools have been blockaded or closed. Police have responded with savage violence and mass arrests. More than 6,600 people, overwhelmingly youth and minors, have been arrested, with more than 5,000 placed in police custody in barely two weeks. Hundreds have been injured. In Lens, a 15-year-old boy lost his hand after picking up a police stun grenade.

Protest signs invoking May-June 1968—when police repression of student protests triggered the greatest general strike in French history—are spreading across France. A growing layer of youth and workers is moving to the left, seeking fundamental social change.

The question is how the working class can intervene, mobilize its social power to halt police violence against the youth, and impose its own solution to the crisis in France and across Europe.

The *Parti de l'égalité socialiste* (PES) advocates building independent committees of action in France and internationally, advancing the demands of rank-and-file workers and youth on every critical question. This is essential to freeing the class struggle from the grip of the union bureaucracies and capitalist politicians.

France's main trade union federations are calling partial strikes and protests in the coming weeks but have delayed nationwide action until November 5.

But the working class cannot wait until November 5. The class struggle must develop freely, starting now. The explosive energy of the youth protests must be turned toward mobilizing the working class in France and across Europe.

The union leaderships seek to retain control over the movement, divide it into isolated protest days and sectoral

actions, and ask the government for limited concessions while blocking a broader mobilization. This is the role they played in 2023, when they called strikes against Macron's pension cuts that were joined by millions, only to shut down the struggle after he imposed the law.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon and La France Insoumise (LFI) seek, by different means, to contain the movement within the existing political order. Mélenchon has denounced police violence and backed the protests but explicitly tries to channel the movement toward the 2027 presidential election. He wrote that LFI must "accompany this period of mobilization and political awareness" by opening a perspective "toward 2027."

This is the opposite of developing the political independence of workers and youth. Mélenchon seeks to transform an explosive movement developing against the capitalist state into support for his campaign to take control of that state through elections.

His perspective rests on the claim that fundamental social improvements can be achieved within French capitalism. But there is no national or reformist solution to an international crisis of capitalism.

France's public debt has risen to almost €3.6 trillion, or 119 percent of GDP. Debt-service costs are rising sharply while financial markets demand deeper austerity. At the same time, the French state is pouring tens of billions into military rearmament and its nuclear arsenal.

The same pressures operate throughout Europe. Governments face huge debts, economic stagnation and growing demands from the financial oligarchy for attacks on social spending.

The far right exploits this crisis while offering an even more brutal program. National Rally leader Marine Le Pen is pledging €140 billion in budget cuts by 2032 while directing social anger against immigrants and demanding a stronger police and state apparatus.

The growth of the far right is not the expression of a population uniformly shifting to the right. It develops amid a mounting movement of workers and youth to the left, whose independent political expression is blocked by organizations that subordinate the class struggle to the capitalist state.

Bound up with this, the European bourgeoisie is turning with extraordinary aggressiveness to militarism and war against Russia.

Here international conflict and internal class crisis reinforce one another. The hundreds of billions required for European rearmament can only be extracted through deeper attacks on wages, pensions, education, healthcare and other social expenditures. The resulting social opposition intensifies the ruling class's turn toward nationalism, militarism and authoritarian rule.

In the years before the First World War, Europe was shaken by mass strikes and growing revolutionary working-class struggle, while the imperialist powers accelerated an arms race and passed from one international crisis to another.

When war erupted in 1914, the ruling classes invoked national defense to demand that workers abandon the class struggle and subordinate themselves to their own bourgeoisie. In France, the Socialist Party and trade union bureaucracy joined the *Union sacrée*; in Germany, the Social Democratic Party supported the *Burgfrieden* and voted for war credits.

Governments do not launch wars simply because they confront domestic unrest. The fundamental causes of imperialist war lie in the contradictions of the capitalist world economy. But for ruling classes confronting mounting opposition, militarism provides a framework to demand "national unity," impose immense sacrifices and strengthen the coercive powers of the state.

This link was graphically expressed on October 6. As hundreds of thousands marched through France, the French military conducted the first test launch of its latest M51.3 submarine-launched ballistic missile.

The launch came only days after Moscow issued an explicit nuclear warning over NATO threats against Kaliningrad. The NATO powers are proceeding on the reckless assumption that they can continuously intensify military pressure on Russia without triggering a catastrophic response.

But repeated survival of earlier crises does not make the next crisis safe. As 1914 demonstrates, it can create precisely the complacency and miscalculation that turn military brinkmanship into catastrophe.

The war escalation and the explosion of the class struggle are not separate questions. The same governments that tell workers there is no money for schools, hospitals, pensions and housing are spending hundreds of billions on armaments. And the military-police apparatus strengthened in the name of external security is being deployed against opposition at home.

A progressive solution requires socialist policies: the international mobilization of the working class to expropriate the vast wealth of the financial oligarchy, end its looting of society and stop the escalation toward war.

The high school and university protests can become a powerful lever for developing such a struggle. Youth must turn to the factories, workplaces and working-class neighborhoods

and explain the common dangers posed by the growth of the military-police machine, the far right, the banks' diktat over social life and the escalation of global war. Workers, in turn, must mobilize in defense of the youth independently of the timetable demanded by the union bureaucracies.

New organizations of struggle and a revolutionary political perspective are required. This is the meaning of the PES's call to build committees of action throughout the French, European and international working class. Amid the explosive class struggles of the 1930s, Leon Trotsky called committees of action a means of breaking the "anti-revolutionary opposition of party and trade-union apparatus" via the "revolutionary representation of the struggling masses."

Committees of action must be established in schools, universities and workplaces, elected and controlled by those engaged in struggle and independent of the union bureaucracies and capitalist parties. They can link school to school, university to university and workplace to workplace; organize opposition to police repression; prepare joint demonstrations and strikes; and break through the national and sectoral divisions imposed on the working class.

Nor can such a movement remain confined within France. Struggles in Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Germany and France express an international process driven by the same capitalist crisis. The whole continent is becoming a powder keg as its governments accelerate preparations for war.

The task today is to unify these movements across national borders and invest them with the greatest possible force. The alternative confronting workers and youth is not between Macron, Mélenchon and Le Pen. It is between the deepening descent into austerity, police-state repression and war under capitalism and the independent political mobilization of the international working class for socialism and the United Socialist States of Europe.



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