

Strikes against austerity in France and Belgium defy union pressure for sellout

By Alex Lantier
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Strikes are spreading among garbage collection and treatment workers in France against the Socialist Party (PS) government's regressive labor law, while strikes against austerity continued among rail and public sector workers in France and Belgium despite union pressure for a sellout.

Garbage workers struck and blockaded truck depots and treatment facilities in Paris and the major incinerator in Fos-sur-Mer that treats waste in the Marseille area, which voted formally to strike. Garbage workers also struck in several other cities, including St. Etienne and Lyon.

Paris city hall confirmed in a communiqué that it had "on Wednesday morning called upon the security forces" to attack striking garbage men blockading their work places. There are strike calls or blockades at garbage treatment plants in the Paris suburbs of Ivry-sur-Seine, Issy-les-Moulineaux, and Saint-Ouen.

"Things are going to get complicated," said Patrice Furé, the chief of staff for the head of Sycotm, the Paris area waste management agency.

"The strike movement right now is growing," he told Reuters. "There are private companies that are beginning to be affected. We are not facing a movement that is running out of steam, far from it."

The garbage strikes came as rail unions in France and Belgium voted to continue strike action against wage and benefit cuts and the labor reforms of the French and Belgian governments. In Belgium, the francophone General Confederation of the Public Sector (CGSP) prolonged the strike by one week, while its Flemish counterpart ACOD-Spoor indicated that it would seek a compromise with management. A garbage strike is spreading in francophone Belgium, including in the cities of Mons, Tournai, and Liège.

In France, the strike movement is continuing despite

close negotiations by the union bureaucracies with state authorities, and intensifying pressure from the PS government to end the strikes before the upcoming Euro 2016 football cup.

Key refineries, including Donges and Gonfreville-l'Orcher in the north and Feyzin in the Rhône valley near Marseille, are still on strike, and the Lavéra facility is still partially blockaded. Work started again at the Grandpuits refinery near Paris, according to CGT sources, after unidentified trade unions called a strike vote and stacked it with workers opposed to the strike, even though a majority of workers at the facility intended to continue striking.

On Tuesday, French rail unions narrowly maintained calls for strike action after extensive talks with railway management and state officials.

"There is a time when, according to a famous quotation, one must know when to end a strike," declared French President François Hollande, referring to French Stalinist leader Maurice Thorez's infamous call to end the general strike of 1936 without the taking of power by the working class.

Hollande's oblique reference to the 1936 general strike and to the treacherous role of the Communist Party amounts to an acknowledgment by the PS that, as it rams through regressive laws in the face of overwhelming popular opposition, the European bourgeoisie is provoking a political confrontation with the working class of revolutionary dimensions. In this, its main strategy is to exploit the absence of revolutionary leadership in the working class.

In France, it is now clear that the only way to force a withdrawal of the law is for the working class to bring down the PS government. The PS has indicated that it intends to stick to the law in the face of all opposition in the working class, relying on the unions and their

political allies to isolate the struggles to a few sections of the working class.

The union bureaucracies, while they do not dare end the rail strike for fear of provoking broader anger and an uncontrollable explosion of workers struggles like the 1936 French general strike, are applying the brakes as much as they can to the strike movement. In this, the main role is played by the Stalinist General Confederation of Labor (CGT) union and Solidarity Unity Democracy (SUD) union, which is close to the petty-bourgeois New Anti-capitalist Party.

On Tuesday, government sources explained to *Le Monde*: “The CGT did not seem to want to oppose reaching a deal on Tuesday morning, but the entire situation depends unfortunately on the national situation with the labor law.”

They made clear, however, that the PS would not budge one iota either on the labor law reform or moves to privatize the French rail sector. “There will be no new negotiations. The agreement negotiated tonight will not go into effect, but there will be unilateral measures by the management of the SNCF [National Railway Society].”

While PS-linked unions are openly demanding the end of the strike, the CGT on Tuesday for the first time did not issue a formal call for continuing the rail strike. However, it did not oppose a call by SUD to continue strike action.

Striking workers who attended general assemblies called by the unions and spoke to the WSWS said that while the unions did not openly call for abandoning the strike, they were starting to discuss ending the strike without the withdrawal of the labor law, downplaying the defeat this would represent.

“They said that the protests had already brought energy and port workers closer together. They said that whatever happens in the protests, we do not have to be embarrassed because we fought well,” one worker told the WSWS.

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