

No to talks with Macron on the privatisation of French railways!

For a political struggle against austerity and militarism in Europe!

By Alex Lantier
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Workers striking on March 22 on the first day of action against the privatisation of the French National Railways (SNCF) are in a critical political battle. This struggle will be long and will not be resolved after the first day of action, because it raises critical questions of perspective for the working class in France and internationally.

Macron has declared that there will be no backing down on his pledge to privatise the SNCF and tear up the labor statute of railway and public-sector workers, any more than from the destruction of the Labor Code, pensions and public health care. He has pledged to decree the abolition of all of these social rights, which were won by workers in struggle throughout the 20th century, following the October Revolution in 1917 and the liberation of France from Nazi occupation in 1945. The ruling class aims to reduce workers in France and across Europe to the status of low-paid temps without any social rights. The attacks against French railway workers are aimed at slashing spending on the SNCF by 27 percent.

The government has no intention of backing down in the face of the unions' proposal for rotating strikes for two days out of five between April and June. The unions have no strategy to propose to the workers. In February, the general secretary of the CGT, Phillippe Martinez, claimed that the statute of railway workers was "not negotiable." Then why have the unions continued to negotiate with Macron?

A powerful movement of the working class is emerging against Macron and the policies of militarism and austerity being imposed by all the governments of the European Union. But to conduct this fight, workers must take the struggle out of the hands of the trade

unions and form their own rank-and-file committees, independent of the unions, to mobilise the broadest sections of workers and young people to oppose Macron and defend social rights. This must be fused with a political struggle by the working class to take political power.

The capitalist press in France and internationally fears the spectre of the 1995 strike by French railway workers. Confronted with the threatened pension reforms of Alain Juppé, the strikers broke out of the control of the unions and placed France and parts of Belgium at a standstill for weeks. The unions would prefer not to mention the 1995 strike, and CGT-Railways secretary Laurent Brun even bluntly declared, "I do not remember 1995 at all... There is a mythology inside the company, but for me, not at all!"

A deep anger is growing among workers against Macron's labour decrees, and the conditions are emerging for the workers to break free once again from the straitjacket the trade unions have imposed on the class struggle through their "consultations" with the employers and the state.

Such a break, when it occurs, will pose fundamental political questions to the workers. The task at hand is to re-establish the connections of the working class to the political traditions of the October Revolution. The international dynamic of the class struggle will leave workers with no other progressive course of action than to take the path of social revolution.

The social attacks being carried out by Macron flow, in the final analysis, not merely from the greed of the French capitalist class, as great as that is, but above all from the global crisis of the capitalist system and the imperialist powers' drive to war. The 27 years since

the dissolution of the Soviet Union have been marked by the rapid unleashing of the neo-colonial appetites of US and European imperialism. Wars, initially waged in Iraq and the Balkans, have spread into devastating interventions in Syria and Africa, and are increasingly being threatened against Russia and China.

Destabilised by these wars and undermined by repeated economic and financial crises since the 2008 crash, European imperialism is launching a vast military rearmament. Macron plans to re-establish compulsory military service, and Defence Minister Florence Parly announced last month in Munich that Paris will spend 300 billion euros on the armed forces by 2024, increasing overall military spending by 35 percent. For Macron, the workers must submit to social regression in order to fund tax handouts to the rich and military re-armament.

These policies have no democratic legitimacy. A bitter political conflict is looming, and the ruling class sees in the opposition of workers to the destruction of their social rights an intolerable threat to its wealth and its military interests. The ruling elite is considering even more brutal measures. Interior Minister Gerard Collomb has declared that the government can quickly and easily reimpose the state of emergency.

The allies of railway and public service workers in their struggle are the workers in France and around the world. More and more, workers coming into struggle are rebelling against the union apparatuses. In numerous states across the US and in the UK, where railway workers are also demonstrating, striking teachers and lecturers have rebelled against the unions. Metal workers have mobilised in Germany, as well as in Turkey.

And in the French-controlled island of Mayotte, strikers have angrily rejected the unions' attempt to utilise attacks by paramilitary police against strike pickets on the island as a pretext to shut down the general strike.

Fifty years after the general strike of May-June 1968, struggles of a similar magnitude are being prepared. The decisive task is to arm the working class with an internationalist and socialist perspective for a revolutionary struggle against war, austerity and the capitalist system which produces them. This is the task undertaken by the Socialist Equality Party, the French section of the International Committee of the Fourth

International.

The SEP emphasises that the workers cannot submit themselves to the old political parties, which for decades have orbited the Socialist Party (PS) of former President Francois Hollande. They have nothing to offer the workers. While Jean-Luc Mélenchon (Unsubmissive France) has supported Macron's reintroduction of compulsory military service in the National Assembly, Olivier Besancenot declares that the New Anti-Capitalist Party wishes to create a regroupment around Benoit Hamon, the former PS presidential candidate. They are collaborating with the very forces leading the assault against the workers.

The SEP rejects this pro-imperialist coalition and emphasises that the workers will obtain nothing from their struggle without a political break with these organizations. While the SEP conducted a campaign among workers for an active boycott of the second round of the presidential elections between Macron and Marine Le Pen, these forces refused to provide any clear slogan for workers, falling in line with the media campaign for a vote for Macron. Today, they are aligned with all of the manoeuvres of the unions.

The SEP orients itself toward the great masses of workers who are entering into struggle, in order to arm the working class with a socialist perspective opposed to the PS, Macron, and their satellites in the pseudo-left. It seeks to provide this emerging movement with a political strategy and to build a powerful socialist and anti-war movement that will take political power across Europe, and reorganize economic and social life in accordance with the needs of society, rather than the profits of the banks.

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