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France

Pensions: a historic mobilization - make it into a victory against Macron

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The strike and demonstration figures are historic, with 1.2 million demonstrators according to the police, more than two million according to the joint union committee, very high strike rates (more than 70% in education), massive mobilisations in the cities. 50,000 in Bordeaux and Toulouse, 20,000 in Le Mans, 3,500 in Alençon, 4,000 in Compiègne, 20,000 in Nice, 7,000 in Agen and Montauban, 4,000 in Gap, 15,000 in Avignon, 50,000 in Nantes, 15,000 in Saint-Nazaire, 20,000 in Rouen, 35,000 in Le Havre, 15,000 in Bayonne and Pau, 13,000 in Quimper, 13,500 in Brest, 11,000 in Angoulême, 10,000 in Poitiers, 13,000 in Angers, and of course several hundred thousand in Paris (far from the 80,000 announced by the Ministry of the Interior)...

In the vast majority of towns (even the smallest ones), the figures were higher than those of the big strikes of 1995, with sometimes one in seven or eight people in the street. In the private sector, participation was exceptional, with strikers coming from the food industry, engineering, cars, electronics...

A general anger

The trigger of this movement is the pension reform, which would force workers to work two more years, with a longer contribution period and therefore reduced pensions. All this in order to hand over tens of billions to big business and to try to pass a milestone in the establishment of pension funds, complementary pensions that would become necessary to avoid growing old in poverty.

However, we know that putting retirement at 60 years and 37.5 years, with a return to calculation of the pension on the basis of the 10 best years of salary in the public and the private sector, is about 3.5% of GDP, which could be recovered for the majority of the population by really taxing the rich and big companies and by stopping the tax gifts to the most well-off. Macron's violent "solutions" are therefore not inevitable.

Beyond the rejection of this counter-reform, a real frustration with the global economic and social situation is being expressed: pensions were already low following the previous counter-reforms, and current inflation, with the explosion of prices, is already reducing the purchasing power of the working classes. The dissatisfaction, the anger, is there, against Macron, against this government, against their contempt, against their unjust policies.

Building a movement to win

The scale of the mobilization places enormous responsibilities on the whole social and political left. Macron must withdraw his reform, we must restore retirement at 60 and increase wages. The government refuses and we will therefore have to raise the level of mobilization, to go from a day of strikes, even a very successful one like today, to an all-out strike until victory, even more massive, with the participation of new sectors.

The trade unions have agreed on a new strike call for Tuesday 31 January. This is far, too far away: we should certainly have built on this first success to announce an earlier date next week, to step up the pace, to organize an increase in strength so that the movement moves into higher gear.

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It is now a question of organizing general assemblies for discussion in workplaces and schools to strengthen and broaden the mobilization, to build cross-sectoral assemblies, to discuss the need to raise the bar by preparing the renewal of the strike from Tuesday 31 January, from 1 February, and until then to mobilize, to build the strike now wherever possible.

This also requires combining different frameworks and forms of mobilization because we cannot afford the luxury of competition in our social camp. This is why we are taking part in the national demonstration on Saturday 21 January in Paris (2pm at Bastille), called by the youth organizations.

This mobilization is a test: all the trade unions and parties, the whole social and political left, the vast majority of the population, are opposed to the reform. If it passes, the government will feel that it has wings and will step up the attacks. On the contrary, if we win, we can turn the tide, win the return of retirement age at 60, wage rises, give confidence to build a political alternative breaking with Macron and his world, for a power of the working classes against this system.

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