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Assault on pensions: French workers' movement must really explode to beat Macron

Wednesday 11 December 2019, by [POUTOU Philippe](#) (Date first published: 7 December 2019).

As many as 800,000 workers took part in strikes and mass demonstration on December 5, the biggest in many years, in opposition to president Manuel Macron's proposals to gut pensions and continue his neoliberal anti-reforms. The strikes brought much of France's transportation system to a standstill and the threat of strikes during holiday travel have raised the stakes, giving the unions leverage against Macron. A new round of strikes and protests is set for December 10.

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The national coordinating committee (intersyndicale) of France's most important trade unions (which includes CGT, FO, FSU, Solidaires, MNL, UNL and UNEF) has called for a new day of mobilizations (strikes and demonstrations) on Tuesday, December 10. The intersyndicale was encouraged by the magnitude of demonstrations and strikes that took place on December 5, and it is feeling the pressure to continue.

What a relief! This means there will be a sequel to Thursday's outpouring, another focal point to build a social movement which playing for the highest stakes. If we want to force the government to bend on its pension reform and, beyond that, to compel it to respond to France's social emergencies, confrontation is inevitable.

The trade union confederations' leaderships are wavering between radical rhetoric (aiming for withdrawal of the pension reform) and tinkering with mobilization on a piecemeal basis without actually attempting to, in practice, coordinate struggle between different sectors, support general assemblies of strikers at the city-wide level, or help organize various actions between the December 5 and 10 demonstrations.

The huge demonstrations of Thursday 5 show that the anger is there for all to see. And trust between activists, strikers, and protesters is slowly recovering as are hopes that we might be able to change the game plan, to overcome the ludicrous idea that one day of protest will be enough to win the battle. At the same time, activists and strikers are feeling the stress, worried that we might fail to transform this confrontation into a fight that involves millions of people, one which allows us to train those who support the actions (69 percent, say the polls) so that they themselves become actors, so they participate in the demonstrations, strikes, and economic blockades.

This is a showdown, and there is not much room for error. December 5 was already quite late on the calendar and the holidays can be complicated for us. But everything is possible today. We have reasons to doubt our strength, we have suffered many blows, we have suffered many defeats, both the number of work-place organizing teams and the overall number of militants have fallen. Yet we

have many reasons to be hopeful because, for all the suffering and despair, the necessity of expressing our dignity is also apparent.

We know our movement must really explode, in the street, in neighborhoods, in workplaces. We must shake the government and the haves to their core. This is the only way to reverse the balance of power.

The government talks, it seeks to calm the situation, it adopts a more moderate stance, it speaks of negotiation, compromise. But no compromise is possible, no negotiation is possible.

We must turn back the government's entire program, we need social policies that redistribute wealth among the population, that return what has been stolen from us for many years, for public services, for pensions, for wellbeing, for housing, for jobs... for our lives, our future.

And the only way to win this is to build a profound, grassroots movement like we did in 1995 -at a minimum - like we did in 1968 or 1936. And even more than this, we need a revolt that puts the question of power and the bosses' property on the table.

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P.S.

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