

France, 46th day in defense of the pensions - A second wind to defeat Macron

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The movement for the withdrawal of the pension counter-reform entered its 46th day of strike at the RATP and SNCF on 18 January, the 46th day of mobilisation in various forms across the country.

The strike movement is still supported by a large majority of the population, support shown by the flow of donations into the strike funds, the various expressions of sympathy even from employees inconvenienced by transport strikes, support shown by all the opinion poll institutes, reminding us week after week that the movement is approved by two-thirds of the population.

Moreover, the same proportion of the population, two-thirds, is expressing growing concern about the reform and the future of their pensions.

Macron hoped to end the strikes with the letter sent to the unions on 11 January.

In that letter, Prime Minister Edouard Philippe pledged to remove temporarily from the bill the “pivotal age”, the obligation to work until the age of 64 in order to obtain a full pension. He also agreed to the CFDT’s request to organise a conference on the financing of pensions which could possibly propose another measure to achieve the 12 billion in savings in the pension insurance accounts required by the government.

This manoeuvre by the government came at a time when the government was on the defensive, unable to rally public opinion to its reform and having failed to quell the strike over the holidays. Philippe’s inflexible stance, having succeeded in alienating the CFDT, was even criticized within the presidential majority.

This “retreat” was applauded by the press. The leaders of the right-wing party the Republicans, only too happy to get back some space faced with Macron, denounced this “retreat of the reform” after “multiple concessions to the special schemes”.

On the side of the trade union movement, only the CFDT and UNSA applauded this announcement, too happy to find a way out.

This manoeuvre had no effect on the strikers, but it was once again an opportunity for government ministers, widely supported by editorialists in the main media, to denounce the determination of the strikers and the unions.

On the other side, it should be noted that a fairly solid trade union front was maintained, bringing together the CGT, CGC, FO, Solidaires and the FSU in the fight for the withdrawal of this so-called reform, unions that represented 56% in the professional elections for, while the CFDT and UNSA represented only 31.2%. (The CFDT is still presented as the leading union in the country, although it

only exceeds the CGT by 0.1% of the votes in total, 24% against 23.9%). [