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Statement (France) – Pensions: this Saturday 11 February in the streets! Strikes and blockades until total withdrawal!

Sunday 12 February 2023 (Date first published: 7 February 2023).

Introductory note by Dave Kellaway, who translated this statement.

Tuesday (7th February) saw the third day of massive mobilisations against President Macron’s proposed extension of the pension age from 62 to 64. It was 60 up until 2010. Yesterday, many universities and some schools were temporarily blocked or taken over by young people. Workers in both the private and public sectors went on strike for the day. France has far fewer restrictions on trade union action, so strikes can be organised more easily against anti-working class measures. Strikers were slightly fewer than on January 31st, but ranged from 14% in schools to 50% or more in oil refineries or on the rail. There were 200 kilometres of traffic jams around Paris, so the strikes had a big impact on transport.

Hundreds of demonstrations took place throughout France; the police gave figures of 757,000, and the main union, the CGT, said there were nearly 2 million. Seven out of ten people in opinion surveys say they oppose the so-called “reform.” MPs from the left coalition, NUPES, were out in force at the demonstrations. TV gave extensive coverage; channels like BFM had a live feed throughout the day. Both MPs and union leaders do not mince their words; they clearly call for the power of the street and strikes to be mobilised to defeat the law Macron is trying to push through parliament. The opposition MPs have put down 20,000 amendments to frustrate the legislation, but everyone realises that it is the social and political relationships of forces outside of parliament that will be decisive. Watch out for the next big day of action, this Saturday (11th February)

NPA Statement

Yesterday [Monday 6 February], the debate on pension reform opened in the National Assembly in a tense atmosphere, while many employees were on strike and in the streets today.

After declaring that the proposed pension age of 64 was non-negotiable, the Prime Minister, Elisabeth Borne, seemed weakened, even more so with the Dussopt affair that has just broken out. [Dussopt is the minister in charge of Pensions reform and is being investigated for giving favours to a private water company - Tr.]

Totally illegitimate, without a real majority, Borne had to concede an extension of the “long career” scheme allowing earlier pensions to those who started working between 20 and 21 years of age. . Big deal! Such manoeuvres that do not change the substance of the reform actually show us that the parliamentary debate will not result in a victory for our social camp, that is to say, the total withdrawal of this regressive bill.

It is of course on the streets and closing down the country that we must count on to make the government back down, to obtain the withdrawal of this counter-reform. Indeed we should be aiming to return to a pension age of 60 years with 37,5 years of service. Today the strikers and demonstrators were perhaps a little less numerous, but the anger is intact and the mobilization of working people is very strong in many cities of France, and at least equal to January 19th, which was hailed as a historic day. 10,000 people marched in Quimper, 45,000 in Nantes, 80,000 in Toulouse, 12,000 in Bayonne, 15,000 in Amiens, 27,000 in Grenoble, 8,000 in Laval, 25,000 in Rennes, 10,000 in Orleans, 15,000 in Cherbourg, 50,000 in Bordeaux, etc.

This Saturday, February 11th, demonstrations must be massive, because in the streets, together, we regain confidence in our collective force and capacity to resist resignation and defeat anti-social policies.

A good turn-out is not sufficient, we need a strategy to win. With repeated days of mobilization, there is a risk that strikers will run out of steam in these difficult days at the end of the month, when each day of strike action costs more. We cannot start a long-distance race without a real battle plan.

To win, we must continue to organize, to put maximum pressure by blocking the economy. We need to prepare now for March 8th and draw up a calendar to build a strike movement that can be extended day by day. We must get support from all parts of society. all the support; to fill the Strike funds should be built up. Links across sectors are needed. Local demonstrations are important. In order to help with this, it is also necessary that the left in the industrial, social and political movements is united.

After three days of powerful strikes and demonstrations (19, 31 January and 7 February), winning the second round of the fight is within our reach.

This is only the beginning...

Montreuil,

Tuesday, February 7, 2023

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P.S.

• Anti*Capitalist Resistance 8 FEBRUARY 2023:

<https://anticapitalistresistance.org/npa-on-pensions-struggle-in-france/>