

## **“MONSTER” MARCHES WON’T MAKE THE GOVERNMENT BACK DOWN, PARTICULARLY THE ONES ON A SATURDAY. STRUGGLES FOR SIGNIFICANT INCREASES IN WAGES, UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS AND PENSIONS MUST QUICKLY TAKE OVER**

*And number four... as a Saturday without strikes*

The fourth giant demonstration against pension “reform” takes place today, 11 February. Like the three that preceded it, it will be hailed by the unions as yet another historic event. But the one on 7 February was marked by the beginning of a decline in the number of participants, and the strikes have clearly weakened. This one, held on Saturday, widens the gap between “citizen” marches and a real struggle on all fronts for wages, pensions and unemployment benefits, against the converging attacks on the living standards and working conditions of proletarians by capital and its state. Laurent Berger, the head of the CFDT, clearly explained on 5 February on France Inter that these rallies do not aim to “block the country ... because we have to pay attention to public opinion” and are not launching “a fight against the government” and are not “anti-Macron”. As for the so-called oppositional unions, their calls for extended strikes quickly sank without trace. And convening workplace general assemblies to vote on the renewal of strikes will not change the situation.

Younger workers are not very sensitive to the “reform” of a pension that they will receive decades from now, as they struggle to make ends meet. And those closest to retirement age are counting on a gradual application of the “reform” that will spare them from a crushing blow. The unemployed, for their part, are struggling with the recent tightening of the conditions of access to benefits and the reduction in the period of benefit entitlement. Finally, pensioners suffer even more than working proletarians from significant losses in purchasing power due to inflation, while their pensions grow much less than wages.

It is therefore not surprising that performative calls for an extended strike, the hollow threat of a general strike, and similar things, appear as so much blah-blah for the great majority of proletarians. The polls, for what they’re worth, say that the majority of public opinion is against the “reform” but that more than 70% of the people questioned don’t intend to participate directly in the movement and even less to go on strike. In this game, after four or five shows of force on the streets, the government will be able to pass its “reform” by betting on the discouragement of the workers involved.

Proletarians are not mobilising, because the question of wages is not taken into account in its entirety. That would mean demanding significant increases in wages equal for all, as well as significant increases in unemployment benefits and pensions, by leading massive struggles well rooted in the productive territories. The government’s “reform” would then be faced with the insurmountable wall of the class struggle, targeting the government, the boss-state and the companies at the same time.

“Monster” demonstrations have never made governments bend, with the apparent exception of 1995. But at that time, the workers directly affected by the plan to abolish the special pension regimes dealt the decisive blow to the “reform” with massive strikes and offensive actions. Giant demonstrations were only the corollary of those strikes. Today, the situation is very different, and revelling in the power of the demonstrations and the public opinion supporting them while underestimating the weakness of the strikes is likely to lead to a very disappointing future.

*This pension “reform” will widen divisions between proletarians*

The parliamentary opposition parties are no more on the side of workers than the trade unions. The “alternatives” to “reform” that they propose hardly question at all the principle that the pensions of older workers should be paid for by younger workers. This idea is enthusiastically shared by the unions, the bosses and their state. In the name of this idea, it is forgotten that pensions are deferred wages. As such, they should be fully financed and guaranteed by companies and the state.

In this context, to negotiate, as the unions are about to do (are they already negotiating?), certain aspects of the “reform” project, is tantamount to playing the tune that the government has written for them. The main areas under discussion concern the consideration of exceptionally difficult work, long careers, the employment of older workers and the status of women.

— On the subject of difficulty, the government is proposing the implementation of a complex mechanism that will first define “arduous” occupations within the framework of branch and then company negotiations. Workers whose jobs are not on this list will still be able to have their degraded health recognised by the occupational health service. This opens the way to different retirement ages and different contribution periods. As long as work is a constraint determined by the imperative of capital growth, any consideration of hardship is an instrument of division.

— On long careers, the government has “opened the debate” in parliament without, however, calling into question the retirement age, which it wants to raise to 64 for all. Not to mention that it will be necessary to work like mad to get recognition for long careers.

— On the employment of older workers, the government said that it was prepared to punish companies with more than 50 employees that lose too many older workers if they do not implement an “action plan” to keep them. The aim is to get older workers to work longer, even if it means giving them lower-paid jobs as part of a possible gradual cessation of activity.

— On the retirement of women who have had interrupted careers, those who have had children could eventually benefit from the “gift” of two quarters worth of contributions per child. As a result, according to Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne, two out of three women will have to work two years longer. And the remaining third are precisely those who will be compensated for their careers affected by the production of children, as a result of the natalist policy.

The thread linking these four specific aspects of the “reform” is the introduction of particular mechanisms individualising the conditions of access to retirement while preserving the basic aim of making proletarians work longer. The urgency of carrying out this “reform” – which will certainly not be the last, according to economists close to the Elysée Palace – is exclusively determined by the need to show Treasury investors a clean bill of health regarding its capacity for “control and budgetary discipline of public accounts”. Finally, the ultimate goal of the “reform” is that the state will no longer spend a single euro to balance the accounts of the pension funds. This money is to be used elsewhere. For example, to finance booming arms expenditure.

### *Linking the struggle against the pensions “reform” to struggles for higher proletarian income*

Focusing mainly, or even only, on the pension “reform” does not create the conditions for the workers’ offensive necessary to beat the government, and it makes us forget that the central battle of the moment is in the workplaces, in front of the Job Centres and the pension fund branches. This battle must be massive and requires the direct and active participation of the largest number of proletarians. To achieve this, it is necessary to respect the necessarily different rhythms of mobilisation of the sectors that are involved in the struggle. To trumpet the slogan of a general strike that can be extended before struggles are well rooted in productive territories is to set the bar for the movement at a level that is unattainable for the moment.

Bosses have understood the risk that this situation of social instability poses to their businesses. Several large and medium-sized companies have distributed bonuses and granted pay rises as a preventive measure to calm things down. But the workers concerned know perfectly well that this is not enough. They know that these increases are insufficient, often individualised in the form of bonuses and in exchange for a higher pace of work, along with total submission to company management, foremen and HR departments. The empty ritual of the Mandatory Annual Negotiation certainly satisfies the trade unions, who gain a bit of legitimacy with the bosses, but not the workers. As for the unemployed, they find themselves with shortened benefit periods and tighter control on the part of Job Centres, the aim of which is to remove the largest number of them from the benefit allocation lists. Finally, pensioners are suffering the consequences of galloping inflation much more than employees, as their pensions are revalued at a rate and at levels that are significantly lower than those of wages.

**Proletarians can only count on their own direct action and  
autonomous organisation to win**

**FOR THE REVIVAL OF WORKERS’ INITIATIVE**

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