

- Remaining only on the terrain of rejecting the pension “reform” and the defence of the “parity system” cannot win.
- “Citizen” demonstrations to influence Parliament are a dead end. Striking by proxy and “Robin Hood” stunts won’t change the landscape either.
- We have to prepare for a long struggle without giving in to the temptation of renewable strikes limited to a handful of sectors.
- The only solution lies in the struggle for higher wages, pensions and unemployment benefits, in workplaces, in front of Job Centres and the CNAV.

Parliamentary democracy against the workers

The government is inflexible and, as we’ll come to understand, will force its way through. The President of the Republic’s answer to the trade unions’ request to meet with him is extremely clear. No, and No again. For Emmanuel Macron, but also for the unions, parliamentary democracy takes precedence over the street, that is, over the interests of the workers. The state plays its role, defending the interests of the ruling classes and, if need be, its interests as a state-boss who no longer wants to contribute to the financing of the parity system of social protection. And this is in the name of the defence of the parity system, introduced in France in October 1946, on the basis of a compromise between Gaullists and the Stalinists of the PCF. In the name of “solidarity between generations” of workers, the latter are called upon to finance their own pensions from one generation to the next.

- This system allows the employers not to pay the full amount of the pensions, which are equally financed by the workers.
- This system allows the state to reduce its financing when the executive considers, as it does today, that it is necessary to spend tax revenues in other ways (e.g., arms spending, which is going through the roof).
- This system is also highly prized by the official trade unions and those who aspire to become them, including the employers’ organisations, because in the joint bodies for the management of social protection they hand out millions of euros in subsidies every year and guarantee thousands of permanent jobs. Including in the rare capitalised pension funds, such as the *Préfon Retraite*, the one for the civil service.

The parity system is a mechanism that benefits both the “social partners” and the state. Workers, on the other hand, have seen their pension conditions worsen over the last few decades. This is compounded by the ideological bludgeoning they have been subjected to by parliamentary and extra-parliamentary parties, trade unions, bosses and state institutions, with their “social security is ours” (the workers’) and the “intergenerational solidarity” between employees. The reality is quite different.

The ideology of parity hides the fact that welfare benefits, all welfare benefits, are wages and as such should be completely the responsibility of the ruling class and their state.

The union strategy of defeat

Thus, instead of representing the exclusive interests of wage earners who would demand that social benefits, including pensions, be paid solely by companies, the rich and their state, independently of the mechanisms and organisations that the latter put in place to provide them, the unions are stubbornly defending the parity system with the weapons of parliamentarianism. After having lost all hope in a vote against the “reform” by the elected representatives of the Republic, the inter-union group is now turning to “citizen consultation”. A referendum in due form that should, according to the union leaders, reconcile representative democracy with the opinion of the population, which is still overwhelmingly opposed to the pension “reform”.

They addressed this “solemn” appeal to Emmanuel Macron himself after having “implored those who run this country to give up their denial of the social movement” (Laurent Berger, head of the CFDT, during the march on 11 March in Paris). We might as well say that the unions do not believe in the current struggle because, without admitting it, they still rely on institutions and electoralism to win, with giant petitions and favourable polls.

The CFDT and the CFTC have already assured us that they will respect the decision of Parliament if the vote on the “reform” takes place in accordance with the rules, without resorting to the many regulatory loopholes that govern the activity of the Senate and the National Assembly. However, the Senate voted on Saturday night, 11 March, with a comfortable majority, in favour of the “reform”. Exactly as the Prime Minister, Elisabeth Borne, had anticipated during her long television interview on France 5 on 6 March. Any other hypothesis of a massive

dissent in the ranks of the majority, including Republicans, or of a motion of censure voted by the combined opposition of the far right, the left and part of the Republicans, had no chance of happening.

Morose General Assemblies and the pipe dream of renewable strikes

Faced with this impasse, the other “weapons” brandished by the unions are general assemblies and the renewable strike. Unfortunately, the first are poorly attended, while the second is a reality for relatively few sectors for the time being and is tending to wane, given the very high price that strikers have to pay in terms of lost wages in a period of galloping inflation. The central instance of workers’ democracy, the general assembly, too often turns into a simulation of parliamentary life where trade unionists and political activists indulge in verbal jousting of no consequence for the boss, due to the lack of any significant presence of workers. A show of hands in favour of the renewable strike by a minority of participants does not guarantee a massive attachment to it by the employees concerned, far from it.

As for the union stubbornness around striking, it does not take into account the fact that it exhausts the forces and the wallets of the striking workers without really bringing the bosses to their knees. The bosses bet as always on the exhaustion and fatigue of the strikers. More incisive forms of struggle and organisation such as walkouts without notice, the strict application of regulations to slow the pace and disorganise production, the holding of systematic and undeclared meetings with the management, as close as possible to the actual workplaces such as workshops, offices and warehouses, or even canteens, recreation areas, etc., could make the struggle last. Yes, because it is now practically a given that the “reform” will become a law of the Republic and that it is therefore necessary to engage the class confrontation in a longer term perspective.

Enlarge the front of struggle to break the impasse

Fighting to defend pensions is not enough, is no longer enough. Many workers are not too concerned by the “reform” because they are above all preoccupied with getting through the end of the month, by increasingly badly compensated unemployment, by increasingly difficult working and living conditions. Not to mention the fact that the power of the company and its personnel management are becoming more and more aggressive and arrogant. It’s time to put all this in the balance, to counter-attack against all these aspects of exploitation without being locked into a purely defensive confrontation like the one against the pension “reform”.

It is also high time that we took things in hand directly, by refusing to delegate the struggle to the unions, to the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary parties of the Left who move within the framework defined by the state.

- The class struggle is not a TV show, that is expressed in opinion polls, that delegates to others or even to other workers the pursuit of the general interests of the exploited and oppressed.
- The class struggle also has to reject the recurring pitiful spectacle of the clashes of processions headed by the “black bloc”, preferably on a Saturday or a Sunday, which only serve to stage the conflict for the use of the dominant classes.
- The class struggle, finally, needs an underground, long term, grass-roots and determined work of accumulation and organisation of proletarian strength. This work must be done where the workers are exploited and where they live. Far from the cameras, from the great operatic declarations, from the institutional places of the bosses’ Republic.

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

FOR THE REVIVAL OF WORKERS’ INITIATIVE

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