

# International Courier SPECIAL ISSUE



## France, Britain



# The Working Class Is Back!

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# EUROPE:

## Mobilization in France, War in Ukraine, Economic Stagnation

Felipe Alegría, IWL-FI



*The European situation is in fact marked by these three major issues: Putin's war against Ukraine, the large social mobilization in France, and the economic stagnation the continent is currently undergoing. The stagnation is also accompanied by high inflation and a banking crisis (Crédit Suisse, Deutsche Bank) that could lead to a generalized recession.*

*Indeed, we cannot speak of the European situation as homogeneous. On the contrary, Europe is a network of countries with very different positions in the hierarchy of states, and very different socio-political situations.*

*In terms of social mobilizations, France and Great Britain, which have seen large mobilizations of workers, have little to do with the climate of "social peace" on the rest of the continent<sup>1</sup>. The wave of strikes these past months in France and Great Britain are the largest in the last 30-40 years. The British working class has been fighting since last summer to recover the purchasing power of its wages, which have been devoured by inflation, and in defense of public services, which have been severely hit by the Tory governments. The vanguard sectors of the struggle are the subway and transport sectors, as well as health and education workers.*

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<sup>1</sup> However, due to its importance, it is worth mentioning the powerful strike day in the German public sector over wages, which paralyzed the country on March 27. This reflects a marked discontent and a strong willingness to fight among the workers.



Total Energies workers picket outside a refinery.

In France, the struggle against pension reform, after Macron passed the law circumventing the French parliament itself (article 49.3), triggered widespread mobilizations, which have been reflected in the twelve days of national struggle, as well as in countless actions and blockades throughout the country, with hundreds of activists involved. The vanguard of the struggle has been workers in refineries, electrical production and distribution, railroads, and sanitation, with their ongoing ("open-ended") strikes.

The heterogeneity of social mobilizations among the countries referred to above can not only be explained by "objective" reasons but, above all, by the actions of the large European trade union bureaucracies. These have been almost completely integrated into the neoliberal apparatus of the EU and its governments, and they employ a conscious policy of stifling the struggles in their countries and preventing unified responses on a European scale.

## The role of the European Union (EU)

However, European heterogeneity occurs within the common framework of the EU, that parastatal institutional apparatus that encompasses most of the continent. It is composed of 27 very diverse countries and is dominated by Germany and France, the EU's two great imperialist powers. And it is managed by a high-level bureaucracy foreign to the will of the European people and alien to the very norms of liberal democracy that they claim to represent.

The EU is the instrument through which Germany and France assemble other European countries around their orbit. On the one hand, they bring together second-tier imperialist countries such as Italy, Spain, or Belgium, whose international weight depends on their integration into the EU, and on the other hand, countries whose status is that of semi-colony, such as those of Eastern Europe since their incorporation, or Greece since the debt crisis.



Germany and France need this continental bloc in order to preserve a relative autonomy vis-à-vis the US and China and to avoid being crushed in their global dispute. Likewise, through the EU, the big German-French corporations are able to impose their plans on the member states as a whole (with the complicity of their respective ruling classes). The EU was decisive in enabling the governments of the member states to impose the brutal counter-reforms following the 2008 crisis. It was also instrumental in supporting the Spanish state in its raid against the Catalan independence movement.

## The impact of the war in Ukraine

Putin's war of national aggression against Ukraine has so far led to clear geostrategic gains for the US to the detriment of Germany and France. The first of these is the breaking of the energy pact between Germany and Russia or, in other words, the cheap Russian gas which formed one of the bases for Germany's economic dominance in the EU and its role on a global scale. This rupture also benefits North American energy groups, which have become the main suppliers of gas to Europe, where they set a much higher price than in the domestic market. To make matters worse, American protectionist chip and anti-inflation laws have also come into play, which seriously disadvantage the European oligopolies vis-à-vis their American counterparts.

Another fundamental consequence of the war in Ukraine has been the strengthening of NATO, i.e. of the US military and its political weight in Europe. This is confirmed by the recent words of Polish

Prime Minister Morawiecki in Washington, where he presented his country as the main standard-bearer of the "new Europe" unconditionally allied with the United States ("*the old Europe believed in an agreement with Russia and the old Europe failed*"). The case of Poland shows a country economically subjugated to Germany and, at the same time, politically and militarily a preferential ally of the USA.

The breakdown of the Berlin-Moscow energy pact, together with aggressive US protectionist policies, has weakened Germany's strength as a global power and given rise to unilateral reactions such as the German macro plan for business support, which is alien to the EU's plans.

France, the other great European power, is sliding even more clearly in decline. Not only is its economy weakening, but also its role as a global imperial power. The so-called Françafrique is disintegrating. The recent humiliating withdrawal of French troops from Mali, following the withdrawal from Burkina Faso and the Central African Republic, is a clear expression of this. This is especially the case since China is occupying the same economic space and Russia is entering the area with Wagner mercenaries. Combined with all this is the immense crisis of legitimacy of the Fifth Republic (involved in an endless Bonapartist drift, with serious attacks on

The increase in the military budgets of European countries in the face of the invasion war against Ukraine is a sign of the strengthening of NATO.



**P**utin's aggression against Ukraine has strengthened NATO. ■■

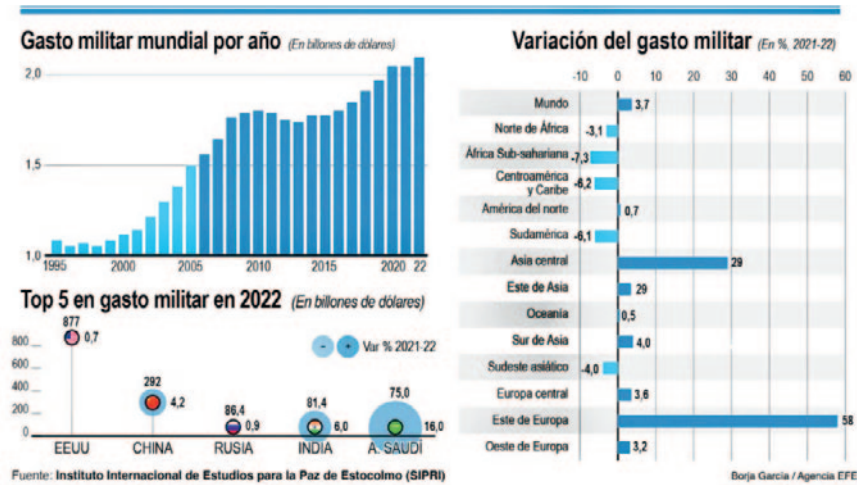
World military spending rose to \$2.24 trillion, boosted by the Ukraine war. Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Borja García. Agencia EFE.

democratic freedoms and an irrelevant parliament), exacerbated to the extreme with the current conflict against Macron's pension reform.

Germany and France, although obligated to maintain their alliance and preserve the EU in the face of challenges from the US and China, retain important differences: Germany is not losing sleep over French concerns in Africa and in its overseas colonies. And in the field of energy, while Germany is tied to gas, France is tied to nuclear energy<sup>2</sup>. Likewise, breaking with the tradition dating back to the defeat of Nazism, Germany has resolved to become a great military power. France, which is a nuclear power and has been the great military power of the EU until now, has decided, in the midst of the battle on pension reform, to relaunch its rearmament with an impressive increase in military spending (413 billion euros in six years) in order to feed its powerful military industry and maintain its superiority in this field.

Both powers, in the face of the aggressive US offensive against China, are striving to maintain an "autonomous" relationship that preserves their trade relations and their large investments in China, which are decisive for their economies. During his recent visit to Beijing, Macron, in addition to defending "European strategic autonomy" and signing juicy contracts, declared that "being an ally [of the US] does not mean being a vassal" and that Europeans should not "be followers" or "adapt to the American rhythm [on Taiwan]." A few months earlier, it was Scholz, accompanied by the crème de la crème of German industry, who visited Xi

<sup>2</sup> No wonder the EU has given nuclear and gas the status of "green energies"!



Jinping, arranged investments, and pledged to deepen economic relations.

## Where are the proclaimed "European values"?

The vaunted "European values" (democratic rights and the *Welfare State*) touted by the EU are increasingly empty promises. We see it in one of its core countries, France, in Macron's actions against one of the pillars of the *Welfare State* such as pensions, in the attacks on the right to strike (via requisitions), and in the brutal repression against participants in protests. The Bonapartist actions of the institutions of the Fifth French Republic on pension reform have also exposed the charlatanism of the EU and its governments when they boast to the world of being an example of the "rule of law."

The EU, the champion of "peace," has approved a large European fund to financially support the arms commitments of Germany, France, and after them the other member states.

It is also this same EU that has legitimized the far right-wing Italian government of Meloni<sup>3</sup> and its racist and xenophobic migration policy. It fits like a glove with the EU's general migration policy and its "express deportations" which have been responsible for the death of thousands of migrants in the Mediterranean (and on route

<sup>3</sup> The CGIL bureaucracy has also collaborated in legitimizing the Meloni government by inviting her to its recent national congress.



to the Canary Islands). These migrants are often forced to leave their homeland because of wars, hunger, and misery largely as a result of the plundering to which their countries have been subjected by companies in mostly European imperialist countries.

The EU has agreed that, as of 2024, it will put an end to the "*fiscal flexibility*" that it agreed to as a consequence of the economic situation generated by the war in Ukraine and that it will then resume with updated "*adjustment policies*". As was the case during the post-2008 debt crisis, these will have a particularly severe impact on the peripheral countries, which are the most indebted and dependent on the European Central Bank (ECB), whose governments will be "forced" to adopt harsh austerity policies.

The decline of France and Germany has weakened their role as the "backbone" that should discipline the rest of the EU countries. We see this in the contradictions between governments over the war in Ukraine or the relationship with Russia, the US, or China. The migration problem is also a serious internal conflict, with the Mediterranean countries trying in vain to "mutualize" the problem to the EU as a whole. Energy policy is also a source of friction between Germany, its closest allies, and the other countries. An acceleration of the crisis can only accentuate these contradictions.

## Where are we?

The French and British working classes are the vanguard of the class struggle in Europe together with the people of Ukraine, who have been heroically resisting, after more than 14 months of Putin's war of aggression, with the

Territorial Defenses, formed and led by workers.

The mobilization against pension reform in France, despite the fact that active European solidarity has basically been reduced to Belgium, has changed the climate of the continent. This has been reflected in the massive German strike day on March 27, and in the general sympathy that this struggle has aroused in the working class throughout Europe. In Great Britain there are posters in the streets calling on people to do as the French or "*Be more French*".

At the same time, it is equally true that, after the approval of the law, the struggle of the French working class against pension reform has entered into a situation of flux, with the open-ended strikes of the vanguard sectors coming to an end because of their isolation as well as the lack of sufficient strike funds. The strategy of the *Intersyndicale* (the leaderships of the trade union coalition) has left the working class exhausted, without, for the moment, a means of coordinating the trade union left wing (local and rank and file sectors of the CGT and Solidaires). Neither has it created steps the movement can follow to self-organize (that is, the creation of direct representational bodies and their democratic coordination) which would allow for a confrontation with the trade union bureaucracies. However, criticism of the union leaderships' strategy is already







Demonstration in Paris against the pension reform on January 19, 2023. *The Express*.

widespread among broad swathes of workers.

The French working class is not experiencing the current situation as a defeat. Macron is isolated and politically badly wounded. Neither he nor his ministers can go anywhere without being massively booed, and they are also suffering power cuts. There are many activists who think that it is necessary to regain strength to return to the struggle at a later time to overthrow the law. We will also see what happens with struggles in certain sectors and, in particular, the struggle for fair contracts given the great loss of purchasing power workers have experienced.

## Some French lessons

The large French mobilization has had important weaknesses, which have allowed Macron to push through the law and to persist in its application, in spite of not having had a majority to approve it in Parliament. The first, basic weakness of the struggle has been the trade union bureaucracies' strategy, which, when faced with the radicalization of power, has necessarily lead to defeat. This strategy has consisted of calling for an indefinite succession of days of struggle, isolated in time from each other without paralyzing the country. Further, they are intended to last until the most advanced sectors exhaust their forces

and the people get tired of attending the demonstrations en masse.

Moreover, the days of mobilization were kept at respectfully pressuring the institutions of the Fifth Republic. They have neither aimed for a general strike until the withdrawal of the bill, nor have they demanded the resignation of Macron and his government and denounced the anti-democratic character of the regime in the name of the overwhelming will of the French people<sup>4</sup>. Meanwhile, the official Left<sup>5</sup> has divided tasks with the trade union bureaucracies, adapting itself perfectly to their strategy. Moreover, they have tried to take advantage of popular discontent to capture future votes, yet always within the framework of submission to the anti-democratic channels of the Fifth Republic. But the battle for pensions has shown that in order to defeat Macron's reform it is necessary to put an end to Macron, to make a stand against the Fifth Republic, and to open a democratic and class perspective against Macron and against Le Pen's extreme right *RN*.

<sup>4</sup> Polls have consistently shown that a majority of 94% of wage earners and 70% of the population as a whole are opposed to Macron's project.

<sup>5</sup> We refer to La France Insoumise and not to the PS, a political corpse after having led several of the worst anti-worker offensives since World War II, in addition to having supported (like the other European socialist parties) the neoliberal treaties and the worst austerity measures of the EU.



Solidarity campaign with the Ukrainian workers' resistance.  
Co.bas, Madrid.

Nor has the movement set out to organize the self-defense of its demonstrations in response to the extreme brutality of the police.

Another relevant aspect has been the absence of international solidarity, a very important factor for twisting Macron's arm. The European trade union bureaucracies are opposed to organizing international solidarity. And further, they are against raising a unified struggle for common objectives at the level of the EU, when it is the EU itself that is directly involved in the European offensive against pensions and, more generally, against labor rights and public services. However, internationalist solidarity and unified struggle are essential to the European labor movement. In the history of the EU, although limited, the only pan-European strike took place on November 14, 2012, with the participation of workers from Spain, Portugal, Italy and there were mobilizations in France, Greece, and part of Belgium as well.

The struggle against pension reform was also combined with the mobilization called for by the *Soulevements de la Terre* movement in defense of water in Sainte-Soline (Poitou). This mobilization was also a massive pronouncement against Macron's reform. We are facing, possibly the largest environmentalist mobilization on the continent, with many thousands of participants and a truly brutal police repression (more than 200 people have been injured and two are in a coma). This struggle has highlighted the enormous importance of the fight against global warming and in defense of the environment. Further, it shows the urgent need for the working class to assume a growing lead role in the environmental struggle, as well as the urgency of



**We demand the dissolution of NATO and the military blocs. Weapons for Ukraine! ■**

coordinating a collective response on the European scale.

### **Solidarity with the Ukrainian people**

Now that the European governments are squeezing the Zelensky government to negotiate "peace in exchange for territory" and are preparing the colonization of Ukraine via the EU, it is vitally important to continue and broaden solidarity with the Ukrainian people and, in particular, with the workers who are at the forefront of the struggle in the Territorial Defenses.

With war as the excuse, European governments led by Germany and France have embarked on an unbridled arms race that has nothing to do with military support for Ukraine. In fact, Ukraine has not received the weapons it has asked for, and when they have arrived, they were late, scarce, and old. At the same time, European governments continue to update and expand their own arsenals.

Therefore, while we demand the imperialist governments deliver the weapons that Ukraine needs, at the same time we fight against the arms race that they have undertaken at the expense of the needs of the people. We demand the dissolution of NATO and the military blocs, which is vitally important given that the US is already betting on the integration of Ukraine into NATO.

It is very important to continue engaging in active and direct solidarity with sectors of the Ukrainian workers' movement. They are the vanguard, and suffer, at the same time, from Zelensky's offensive against workers' rights. The most genuine solidarity is that which takes place among the working class itself.

We reject any false hope that peace and prosperity in Ukraine can come from the hands of the US, the EU, and their governments, whose corporations are poised to massively grab Ukrainian resources and heritage once an armistice with Russia has been signed.

## **We stand with immigrants, and for their rights**

The anti-migrant plans of the far-right Meloni government in Italy are an excellent example of the scale of the immigration problem in Europe as a whole. The savagery of the Greek government and its criminal Coast Guard, the drama of the Melilla fences of the "progressive" Spanish government, and the rabid xenophobia of the Danish government, are all expressions of the same reactionary policy. All these policies have been endorsed and sponsored by the EU.

At the same time, the Italian government, as other governments such as the Spanish or French, and the EU itself, has subcontracted authoritarian governments (or directly mafias such as the Libyan coast guard) to persecute migrants in their countries of passage or

origin, subjecting them to conditions of extreme cruelty. This is why it is of prime necessity to denounce migration laws, to put an end to them, and to demand the legalization of undocumented migrants and that they share equal rights with nationals.

## **Raising the banner of internationalism and the construction of a revolutionary international**

If we are behind in Europe in anything, it is in the internationalist response to an EU that is a perfectly oiled machine in its capacity to unify the attacks of capital against the continent's working class. All the official left, including the "new progressive left" is subject to the EU and will do nothing against its neoliberal treaties and anti-working-class guidelines.

In the heat of concrete mobilizations and the battle for effective internationalist solidarity, we have to retake the revolutionary tradition and raise the flag of another Europe. That is, the Europe of the workers, the people, the United Socialist States of Europe, which we will only be able to raise on the ruins of the Europe of Capital, otherwise known as the EU.

In order to build this perspective in the present battles, we have to take steps in the construction of revolutionary parties in each country and a revolutionary international. In the International Workers League (IWL-FI), we are engaged in that battle.

Ukrainian and African migrants at the Polish border.

<https://www.newtral.es/racismo-frontera-polonia-ucrania-nos-preguntais/20220305/>





# First Lessons

## from the Movement Against Pension Reform in France

*On April 14, some expected the Constitutional Council's decision to be a key element of the mobilization against the pension "reform," which Macron decided to impose on the people of France despite massive, unwavering opposition.*

Michaël Lenoir, France

### Macron chooses contempt and imposition by force to the very end

In the service of the Elysée monarch, some commentators even described it as the key decision that would definitively close the debate and put an end to the social mobilizations that have now been going on for three months. As if the self-proclaimed "wise men," who decide what is or is not constitutional among legislative texts were fair and impartial in the service of a "democracy" in turn guaranteed by the Constitution of the Fifth Republic! On Friday evening, the Council's "wise men" mostly chose to validate Macron's "reform." According to the texts, he had two weeks to enact the law validated by the "wise men." He could also resume negotiations on certain aspects of the "reform." While assuring that the struggle against the "reform" was not over, the *Intersyndicale*, a French trade union coalition, asked the President not to sign it into law. Instead, backed by the Constitutional Council, the President had already declared that he would enact it within 48 hours. In the end, Macron acted even faster, putting the law into effect at 3:28 a.m., much to the chagrin of all those who continue to believe – or make believe – that it is possible to negotiate with the master of the Elysée and instill some



The French people rebel against the reforms imposed by the Constitutional Council. Photo: AFP, March 29, 2023.

moderation in him. In doing so, Macron once again never misses an opportunity to show his contempt for the people, workers, and unions. He has unleashed more and more anger and even hatred among the people against his person and, beyond that, against the regime he embodies. What could possibly resolve the situation in the near future, after this new attempt to impose himself by force? After presenting some analysis on the causes of this social uprising and describing the character of the last three months of struggle, this article attempts to answer this question.

### What caused the explosive social situation?

The social unrest has had multiple causes, but we will try to summarize the main facts about Macron's government. Firstly, there



Demonstration in Paris of youth organizations against the pension reform on January 21, 2023.

is the opposition between Macron and the popular classes, not only because of his program, but also because of his presidential style. For centuries, there has been little love between the tenant of the Elysée and the popular classes. Let us even say that they have a history of hatred as reciprocal as it is growing. This permanent class tension has been compounded by the social and economic crisis of the pandemic, with a very inadequate government response and, more recently, uncontrolled inflation.

### *Yellow Vests and resistance to the first attempt at pension reform*

The arrogance of Macron, who notably passed through the National School of Administration (ENA) and the Rothschild Bank, very quickly got on the nerves of the country's proletarians. Barely two months after his election in 2017, at the inauguration of a Parisian train station, Macron set the tone for his presidency by expressing his class contempt for the anonymous and the underprivileged in a phrase that has become famous: "A train station is a place where you find people who are successful and people who are nothing." This phrase was followed by other derogatory and hurtful "Jupiterian" comments. However, many of the "people who are nothing" would soon rise up en masse starting on November 17, 2018, with the beginning of the Yellow Vests movement. Macron's police and Christophe

Castaner - his Minister of the Interior at the time – are responsible for the deaths of some demonstrators during this period, while the Yellow Vests recorded hundreds of wounded and maimed, including about thirty people who lost an eye "to be made an example of" for other demonstrators. The trend among policemen at the time, under the orders of the sinister Paris police prefect Didier Lallement, was to shoot rubber bullets at eye level. It is easy to understand that deep inside the sociopathic brains of Macronist leaders, "people who are nothing" hardly deserve any consideration of their health and physical integrity. It makes sense, since they are nothing! Is it any wonder, then, that they are mutilated and even killed, while their killers deny the existence of police violence? This denial has been reiterated by the regime, the police unions, and the omnipresent, mediocre cohort of media vigilantes in the service of those in power.

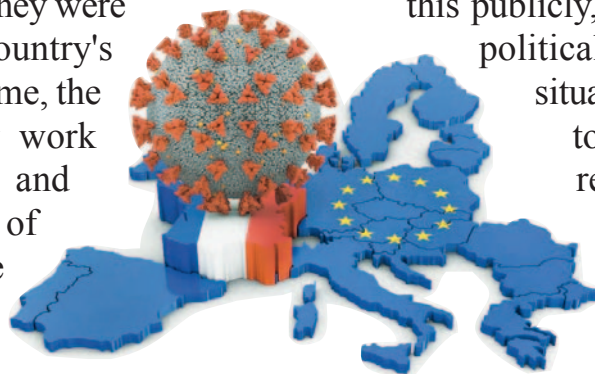
While the Yellow Vests mobilization began to lose momentum, notably weakened by fierce police and judicial repression, the struggle against Macron's first pension "reform" took over between early December 2019 and February 2020. Though the logic of the first iteration was different from that of the current text, it nevertheless would have had a catastrophic impact for workers. The winter of 2019-2020 was marked by major strikes against this reform, mainly in



the transport sector, especially in the railroad companies (SNCF) and in Paris (RATP). But the management of the protest, which called for alternating strike days by a narrower union coalition than that of this year, left the strikers isolated. In the end, it was the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic that prevented the implementation of this "reform".

### *The long and numbing COVID pandemic*

Then came two years when the struggle was largely put on pause, and when the country was hit not only by the COVID pandemic, but also the inept, ineffective, authoritarian, and infantilizing sanitary measures that the Macron government reserved for the population. In particular, the working classes were divided into those forced to expose themselves to the virus to ensure the country's necessary material production and services, and those who largely returned to remote work. It became clear how the former (caretakers, sanitation workers, supermarket cashiers, delivery people, transportation and factory workers, etc. etc.) were not only "nothing," but they were the ones who kept the country's economy going. For a short time, the unsung heroes of everyday work received praise and encouragement from all of society—even from the government, which applauded the caregivers for



their courage in performing their role in a hospital system devastated by years of neoliberal destruction.

### *Macron's second term*

Macron was reelected on April 24, 2022, in a context marked by the difficult aftereffects of the pandemic, with public services in disarray, dramatic austerity, and growing poverty among the popular classes, compounded by the war in Ukraine and an accelerated, increasingly palpable climate catastrophe. He won fairly easily, but with more difficulty than in 2017, with a rematch of the Macron-Le Pen contest in the second round. It was in the June legislative elections especially that Macron's electoral coalition suffered a setback, with a reinforced presence of the institutional left amassed in the NUPES; but primarily with the arrival of 89 deputies from Le Pen's Rassemblement National (RN, "National Rally"), an unprecedented phenomenon in the Fifth Republic. Once again, Macron was elected primarily to block Marine Le Pen and the RN. First, Macron acknowledged this publicly, seeming to admit the political implications of the situation. He then hastened to "forget about it" and return to his proverbial arrogance and attacks on workers. He remained in the Elysée, not *because*



The ineffectiveness of the sanitary measures imposed in France during the Covid-19 pandemic had put on hold the previously announced pension reform which the government is now vigorously pursuing.

Macron sends army into the street to crack down on Yellow Vests protests." Source: <https://arainfo.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/gilets-jaunes-2.jpg>

of, but *in spite* of having announced his pension "reform" during the 2022 campaign. Inflation had begun to erode the purchasing power of the majority, and in the summer, struggles for wage increases broke out. In the fall, a refinery strike severely hampered fuel supplies, prompting the government to take authoritarian measures to requisition the strikers. But the battle over pensions was not long in coming, as Macron wanted to act quickly in this arena.

### *Pensions again!*

The Borne government's reform announced on January 10, aims to delay the retirement age from 62 to 64 and to accelerate the extension of the minimum contribution period, which had been planned since 2013. The government's argument is that the French "must work harder" to compensate for the State's indebtedness during the COVID crisis and make up for the structural deficit of the pension system, which is 1.8 billion this year and will be 13 billion in 2030. Clearly, Borne and Macron dodge key facts that delegitimize the need for reform and demonstrate that their government has the interests of the ultra-rich and large multinationals at heart. Recall, for example that in 2017 Macron's first measure as president was to abolish the tax on large fortunes (the ISF), which was estimated to bring the state some €3 billion a year. In addition, the major French multinationals listed on the CAC 40 had another year of record profits with €142 billion in 2022 (€156 billion in 2021). It should also be noted that the government voted in December for an astronomical increase in military spending to €430 billion for the 2022-2030 period. The money to satisfy and improve the vital needs of the workers in France exists in

**T**he pension reform shows for whom Macron is governing. ■



abundance. What is lacking is a workers' government that puts the economy at their service and under their control. And the Macron government is going in the opposite direction!

Always approaching leadership with an authoritarian attitude, contempt, and never open to dialogue, Macron has achieved singular performances against his government and has scored many points against his own team. With this kind of reform, and a by ignoring the unions, he has managed to unite all the trade union leaderships against him, including the CFDT, the CFTC, and the CFE-CGC, who are accustomed to government pacts and opposing strikes. The unions' rank and file, who are very angry, have also pushed their leaderships to stay united and not to give in. And let's not forget that the fight for pensions is taking place in the context of wage strikes, which have not ceased since this winter. It cannot be otherwise given the current inflation. In February 2023 it was +6.3% annual average, but +16% for commodities and +14% for energy

### **A brutal reform, thoroughly rejected**

The rejection of this counter-reform is even more massive and deeper than the reform was in the winter of 2019-2020. All the



student unions, high school unions, and youth organizations have united in a nationwide coalition oppose it. The polls since January are very clear: 94% of the active wage earners and more than 70% of the population oppose this project; 65% of those recently polled believed that the country should be shut down in order to prevent it. This has never been seen before!

### *Three months of struggle with the Intersyndicale*

Between January 19 and April 13, 12 days of nation-wide mobilizations called by the national Intersyndicale had already taken place. Apart from the Saturdays of February 11 and March 11, these were interprofessional calls for demonstrations and 24-hour strikes. From January 19 to March 7, five national interprofessional days of the Intersyndicale (with a strike and demonstrations) were massively attended. The demonstrations were especially immense (with between 1 and 3 million people on the streets, according to the unions). There was then very little self-organization in the struggle and the open-ended strikes did not work. Almost everyone followed the slogans of the Intersyndicale.

A new historic day of mobilization was planned for March 7, according to Intersyndicale leadership, in order to "paralyze the country".... but only for 24 hours. On March 7, strikes began in several key sectors: power plants, gas distribution, refineries, railroads (SNCF), and in the waste collection and treatment sector.

Through March 15, the general strategy was for mass demonstrations, very peaceful, under the control of the inter-union, but with decreasing participation in the strikes. Self-organization was very difficult and limited

in the interprofessional assemblies of strikers, and grassroots general assemblies (GA), etc.

### *The key role of the industrial proletariat*

The industrial proletariat has been one of the key sectors in this strike wave, which staged a first confrontation with Macron by effectively blocking key sectors of the economy. This is the case with the refinery oil workers, especially in Normandy, the sanitation workers in Paris, the SNCF railway workers, and the employees of the electricity and gas companies. In mid-March, 16% of France's gas stations and 30% of those in Paris were suffering supply problems. Selective power cuts continue to occur. On several occasions, Borne has sent the police to break up picket lines, requisitioning workers in an attempt to reopen refineries and incinerators. While these initiatives succeeded in weakening the strike at the Gonfreville l'Orcher refinery, they did not achieve their goal of crushing the strike by force. Rather, the vanguard of the movement, the young militants and trade unionists who were most conscious of the strategic role of the industrial proletariat, mobilized in an effective and impressive manner to materialize solidarity with the strikers. At the Normandy refinery or at the Ivry incinerator in particular, it resulted in temporary victories against the police.

Striking workers at the TotalEnergies refinery in Donges, western France, gather outside the plant. Image AFP.



### *Article 49.3 and the weakening of the regime*

As of March 16, after a botched discussion in parliament, the government decided to use one of the Fifth Republic Constitution's authoritarian measures (article 49.3) to force the adoption of the text without a parliamentary vote: Macron and Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne knew that they did not have a majority in the National Assembly. In response, popular anger erupted and was expressed in the streets and in all kinds of strategic and symbolic places. Mass demonstrations were held on March 23, but the number of demonstrations tended to decrease, mainly due to the fear of police violence and the absence of a self-defense organization within the movement. Some sectors, however, are not afraid, and are radicalizing. Thousands of actions have taken place in the last 5 weeks. The tendency of those involved in the struggle to grow in number and become more resolute has been very clear.

From that day on, the mobilization has gone beyond the framework of the Intersyndicale and no longer only challenges the reform and Macron, but also the anti-democratic functioning of the Fifth Republic itself. This emerging political crisis was aggravated by the Constitutional Council's April 14 decision, which validated the use of article 49.3 and invalidated the request for a popular referendum on the reform. However, the solution is not a 6th Republic, re-founded within the framework of the 5th, as proposed by Melenchon's France Insoumise. That would be an unsatisfactory answer to the most mobilized sectors, who demand a workers' democracy and hope for a government by and for the workers.



Each demonstration, considered as "wild", forbidden or not declared in advance, ended in clashes with the police.

### *Radical and illegal actions*

From March 16 onwards, there has been a wave of radical and even illegal actions, with "wild" (undeclared or prohibited) demonstrations in several cities on a regular basis, almost always culminating in clashes with the police.

Several blockades took place at Charles de Gaulle airport (with up to 24 km of traffic jams on March 23). Roads, highways, and the Paris ring road were cut off by demonstrators. Especially on big mobilization days, train stations and railroads have been overrun, as well as public buildings, such as town halls or prefectures. Even police stations have been attacked and set on fire in several cities.

In the face of police interventions to break strikes at refineries, landfills, and waste treatment centers, it is worth remembering that hundreds of people turned out, often at the last moment, to support the strikers. The numerous cases of repression have given rise to militant rallies in front of courts and police stations.

On April 5, a "normal" day, that is, not one of the national Intersyndicale mobilization days, there were at least two significant



"spontaneous" actions. A banner reading "No to 64!" was hung at the top of the Arc de Triomphe, visible from far away, and the 9th Arrondissement town hall was flooded by demonstrators chanting and hurling slogans.

Politicians in favor of the "reform" were punished: deputies' offices and residences were boarded up, vandalized, or covered with metal sheets; EDF (Electricité de France) agents were cutting off their electricity; "welcome committees" against pro-reform politicians have been everywhere, planning their interventions systematically!

Now that institutional logic has been breached by the forced passage of the law, there is much talk of sabotaging the Paris 2024 Olympic Games! But Paris is not the only city in uproar. Since January, dozens of small towns have registered an unprecedented number of demonstrators. Currently, there is much talk of surrounding cities such as Marseille, Nantes, Le Havre, Bordeaux, etc.

On March 20, a vote of no-confidence against the government was put to an Assembly vote by the left with some

support from the center and right parties, in addition to the Rassemblement National. It lacked only 9 votes (out of 577) to bring down the government. At the institutional level, the night of April 14 was the most awaited when the Constitutional Council was to determine whether the law was constitutional.

## **Macron has been discredited. How do we organize next steps?**

The "wise men"—that is, what the mainstream media call the 9 members of the Constitutional Council appointed by the leadership of the bourgeois state, who are mostly conservative or reactionary—have judged the reform to be generally constitutional. They only rejected parts of the reform that were favorable to older workers, as well as a request for a referendum formulated by the left. Macron had 15 days to sign the reform into law but did so in the early hours of the night between April 14 and 15. Today, the Borne government is trying to turn the page and stabilize the country as Macron continues to play the arsonist by pouring gasoline on the fire. His persistence in humiliating the unions is contributing to the radicalization of workers.

### *Macron and his ministers in the spotlight*

The frustration and anger have continued, thus keeping alive the possibility that the movement, now in retreat, will resume either against the pension reform which will not be implemented until September, or within the framework of wage negotiations which Borne would like to initiate with the Intersyndicale. In the meantime, the collective hatred against the government continues to express itself with spontaneous actions in the absence of a real strategy to build the strike. Wherever Macron or his ministers go, protest actions will at least be attempted. For example, Macron's trip to



"No to 64!" reads the banner hung atop the Arc de Triomphe by workers during the protests. AP photo, April 5, 2023



Elisabeth Borne, Prime Minister of the Macron government.

visit a factory in Sélestat, in Alsace, is very telling as he was loudly booed and even insulted. In addition, EDF activists cut off power to the factory during his visit! Tens or hundreds of thousands of people refuse to leave them alone! And that is good news!

Macron intends to "appease the country" before July 14, but the most combative sectors, unlike the President, do not want to turn the page on pensions. Even the softest trade unionists refuse to endorse the law's forced passage. For the moment, no trade unionist is openly willing to hold discussions with Macron. As Sophie Binet, the new confederal secretary of the CGT, put it "*he is holding out his hand to us after cutting us off!*"

Macron has become very isolated. Even some of the media who usually supports him have had to distance themselves from him and his government. Only businessmen, who criticize his methods (their form but not their substance), attend his new meetings. But even in the business sector there is no unanimous agreement. For instance, the tourist sector has expressed its discontent with the situation since garbage on the sidewalks and clashes between police and demonstrators scares away tourists. Parisian restaurateurs have said the same.

## *Views of Macron from abroad*

At the international level, the bourgeois press has lashed out against Macron, as can be seen in the Financial Times or the Frankfurter Allgemeine. Why? Because his brutality and contempt for social dialogue has radicalized the class struggle. The working-class struggle in France is supported by the working classes of other countries and could destabilize their bourgeoisies. For instance, in Britain the hashtag "Be more French" has flourished. While in Germany, during the March 27 mega-strike and since, many workers have said they were inspired by the struggle in France.

After the canceled visit of King Charles III, it was the Algerian president who cancelled his trip to France. In short, Macron, who was celebrated as a hero by European capital in 2017, seems to have become a liability, a lame duck of the international bourgeoisie.

## *Violent repression and police abuse*

How do we explain why Macron remains in power? Firstly, one method is repression, which is symbolized in particular by the abuses of the BRAV-M motorized brigade. Revived in 2019, it has been at the center of numerous violent incidents denounced by the press. The government no longer



BRAV-M motorized brigade used in the crackdown on protesters.  
Photo from Tony Comiti Productions in the April 2, 2023 article.



convinces its people; instead, it is hated, and therefore rules through repression. State violence is used to injure, maim, kill, and terrorize people into going home! The police do not do traditional "policing." They are thugs unleashed against protesters with increasing violence.

Let's not mince words: this arrogant president and his Minister of the Interior, the horrible Gérard Darmanin, are murderers. After the Yellow Vests, demonstrators have again been mutilated: a peaceful trade unionist, for example, lost an eye from a grenade shot in Paris on March 23. Each demonstration has been subject to arbitrary repression since the use of article 49.3. On March 25 in Sainte-Soline (Poitou), the police went on a rampage against demonstrators that left 200 injured, 40 of them seriously, two in a coma, and one 32-year-old man still on the brink of death. The recordings show that the prefecture and police chose to block the arrival of medical aid, preventing the treatment and rescue of this activist, who may never return to his former self.

Human rights defenders in France and around the world have denounced this repressive abuse, but Macron and Darmanin press on. The latter wants to dissolve the environmentalist associations and has threatened to cut subsidies to the League of Human Rights. Arbitrary arrests have taken place and sentences handed down against simple demonstrators. The judiciary has justified police blunders and moved away from the rule of law.

### *The struggle's strategy must be changed immediately*

The second and perhaps most important reason that explains why the reform was approved despite its popular rejection through mass mobilization, and why the Macron government remains in place, is the misguided strategy of the Intersyndicale. Its objective was and continues to be to apply pressure through big demonstrations in order to negotiate. It has not developed a dynamic of struggle and a real relationship with working class power, which would allow workers to bring the economy to a stand-still in a big general strike and give workers a say on pensions and many other questions. This strategy of containment of social struggles has prevailed for 20 years and almost always leads to defeat; it is made manifest in day-long strikes, alternating and spaced out, which cause workers to lose wages without stopping the economy and thus demoralizes workers. Macron does not care about all that and executes his will by force, defying the people and the unions.

Therefore, to win we must bring the country to a grinding halt. This means building a general strike until the law Macron would like to start implementing in September is withdrawn. Our camp remains like a chicken running around with its head cut off. There is, on the one hand, a national, bureaucratic Intersyndicale, which proposes now to make May Day a historic day... (and then what?). On the other hand, hundreds of thousands of people are participating in the struggle, refusing to give up, but remaining

*The demonstration for the protection of the environment in Sainte-Soline, in the center-west of France, on March 25, was the scene of a violent repression that left many injured, some of them seriously. Source: eitb.eus - Photo: EFE.*







insufficiently organized and coordinated since there has been no centralization. The struggle is falling into a kind of pit: the isolated, open-ended strikes, which lack sufficient strike funds, have come to a halt. But many activists understand this above all as an opportunity to recuperate energy to start a new struggle soon. At the same time, the youth, which was absent at the beginning, is becoming more and more mobilized on a much more radical basis than the union leaderships. They frighten the powers that be.

It is therefore urgent to provide the movement with a political program to organize effectively and win. In this context, it is necessary to build self-organization from below in the unions and elsewhere. It is a matter of putting a truly independent dynamic into practice within grassroots union organizational structures, such as the interprofessional assemblies, and also of creating and developing democratic structures, so that other sectors of the movement and the youth in struggle can coordinate. In any case, the essential thing is that the sectors involved in the struggle need to be able to decide for themselves on

Throughout France, the demonstrations and protests against the pension reform are becoming more radical, despite the role of the bureaucracies.

the next deadlines for the building of a general strike, on the political slogans and demands of the movement, while laying the foundations of this alternative leadership to the Intersyndicale. If the strikes were to stop, it would be because of the lack of perspective and because many people have lost days of salary for nothing. At the same time, the great mass of workers would like the Intersyndicale to bring the country to a halt until the reform is withdrawn, but they are not willing, for the moment, to replace the Intersyndicale with a leadership that is more radical but still very much in the minority. Therefore, it is necessary that the rank and file unions, the GAs of the Interpro, etc., directly challenge the union leaderships and demand from them what they have so far refused to do: to bring the economy to a halt with a general strike until victory.

But this movement against pensions has shown that the capitalist system not only forces us to work longer and under ever-worsening conditions, but also holds up the



dynamics of oppression, particularly against women, who face severe discrimination when it comes to the valuation of their productive and reproductive work. Behind the demands for pensions and wages, the capitalist system of exploitation for profit has been facing increasing skepticism and opposition.

This system is also destroying the environment and the social achievements of past generations such as health care and education. "What good is a pension on an uninhabitable and toxic planet, a planet that is on fire?" young activists shout in the streets.

The pension movement thus offers the opportunity to raise and articulate various demands coming out of the social movements, and to build a political alternative against all projects of the ruling parties, whether neoliberal or pro-capitalist, more or less shameful, or pretending to change the system from within through a reformist and institutional approach.

The run-up to May Day, which everyone wants to see as a historic moment, should contribute to the advancement of these two elements of change in the balance of power. It is at this price that we will be able to win an historic victory, and perhaps go much

further than the withdrawal of this "reform".

The anti-democratic character of the Fifth Republic makes it practically impossible to withdraw the reform without overthrowing Macron.

Therefore, the movement can no longer limit itself to demanding the withdrawal of the reform and a real increase in wages: it must also urgently demand an end to repression and the reconstruction of political and social rights that face serious threats. In short, faced with a repressive and illegitimate power, it is necessary to propose a way out that allows workers to build and implement their own government.

To really challenge the Macron government and the anti-democratic framework of the Fifth Republic cannot be made without a challenging also the policies of the European Union and its structures.

Macron constantly invokes it to impose his "reform" at all costs, and it is in fact the EU as a whole who attacks pensions and unifies the bourgeoisie's battle against our rights. It is therefore necessary to build a framework of struggle at the EU level in order to defend our pensions by launching and coordinating the solidarity of the European proletariat.

To succeed in their demands French workers must also question the policies of the European Union as a whole.



# A policy for Ukraine: a challenge for coherent internationalists

Lucas Peeters, France



Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation.

Photo: Aleksey Babushkin/ Sputnik/ AFP en Folha de Pernambuco,  
3 de mayo de 2023.

## Defining precisely the geopolitical stakes

### *On Putin's side*

At the time of writing, the intensity of the fighting in Bakhmut is causing unprecedented casualties in the conflict between Ukrainians and the Putin regime. Despite the Wagner group's capture of some positions in the town, its leader declared: "It is necessary to put a definite end to the special military operation.... Today, the best option is to inform the whole world that Russia has achieved the results it had set out to achieve." This seemingly independent statement by Yevgeny Prigozhin is symptomatic of the difficulties in matching the political objectives set by the political and military general leaders with their implementation. Political objectives seem to be constantly redefined in terms of the balance of power. Thus, more than a year after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, it remains difficult to

establish the objectives and priorities of the Russian invasion: is it to counter NATO's development in Russia's neighborhood? Or is it to bring about the collapse of the Ukrainian government and state, and replace them with a government more conducive to safeguarding Russian interests in the region? Or is it simply to secure Russia's control over access to the Black Sea? Or is it to finally advance in the reconstitution of a "tsarist" empire?

### *On the NATO side*

The hypothesis that NATO is arming the Ukrainian resistance to enable it to quickly crush Russia is unlikely, especially if one notes the gradualness and inadequacy of the military aid that has been sent to the Ukrainian resistance. This includes missiles whose range does not allow them to attack the Russian launch bases, announcements of tank or anti-missile battery shipments requiring infrastructures which will take several months to assemble, and which do not in fact respond to the military emergency. The announcements of military

Leopard2 anti-aircraft tank sent by Germany to Ukraine.

Photo: Frank Hofmann/DW.





support for Ukraine thus seem more like a pretext on the part of the countries involved to increase their own military budgets and justify their internal security policies as well as their imperialist aspirations. It should be noted that we do not believe that the war in Ukraine is primarily the terrain of an inter-imperialist military confrontation, or that it is primarily a war of national liberation, yet the exacerbation of inter-imperialist economic tensions increases the possibility of a long-term inter-imperialist war.

In terms of the immediate situation, this scenario mainly serves the Putin regime, as it places limits on arms shipments to the Ukrainian resistance, without preventing escalation. This is because a Russian victory would strengthen the aggressor's ability to repeat such operations, especially due to its greater ability to obtain raw materials through mines in eastern Ukraine, or by seizing part of Ukrainian agricultural production.

### **Some general geopolitical core ideas and contradictions to be taken into account by internationalist revolutionaries**

In terms of the present state of the conflict, proposing an international policy of support to the progressive forces in the various countries concerned is a major challenge in defeating those who seek to profit from the war in various countries. This policy must be addressed first of all, of course, to the proletarians involved in the Ukrainian civil and military resistance, but also to the Russian opponents and to the militant networks claiming to be anti-imperialist in the NATO countries. This last point is all the more important since part of the support for Putin is the result of the neo-colonial policies of some of these ex-NATO countries, as evidenced by the pro-Russian



Russian attacks in Kiev.  
Photo: Daniel Leal/ AFP for Peru 21.

demonstrations in the Democratic Republic of Congo during the visit of the French President last month, with dozens of demonstrators carrying Russian flags. These reactions, which must be "understood" as well as combated, may also provide a better understanding of the opposing pro-NATO or pro-EU trends that have been developing in Ukraine since 2014. Indeed, among the aspirations of the Maïdan movement, in addition to social demands, was the desire to emancipate itself from Russian interference in Ukrainian political and economic life.

### **Which footholds for what kind of latitude in the situation?**

#### *In Russia*

The social situation in Russia at the moment is marked mainly by a social movement that has been contained for years by governmental and even para-governmental repression. The imprisonment or poisoning of "liberal democrat" opponents, or the assassination of journalists, often occupy the media space outside the country. But beyond these "examples," the whole social movement itself has been rigorously attacked.

The effectiveness of the methods of repression have also been accompanied, for the time being, by the advantages of internal stability for the social classes that lived through the chaos of capitalist restoration in the 1990s. For now, the scenario of an immediate collapse of Putin's regime through a popular revolt seems, consequently, highly unlikely. However, the human and material costs of the Russian invasion, and thus indirectly of the Ukrainian resistance, is producing social tensions that can be expected to develop with the continuation and hardening of the conflict.

Among the resistances that are likely to grow, there is, as in many countries, the women's movement, which has been active since the beginning of the invasion, but whose demonstrations have been repressed. There are also organizations of the revolutionary left or the country's second trade union confederation, but they have

also been strongly repressed. The anarchist networks also express their opposition to the war, for example, by calling for acts of sabotage on the railroads. Among the forces resisting the war effort are soldiers who have been deserting the front lines or revolting, with their families' support, and civilians protesting against Putin's compulsory military service, which targets ethnic and national minorities and spares the most vulnerable. Human rights groups have also lent their support. Like all the above-mentioned forces, the mothers of soldiers do not yet play a role important enough to destabilize the regime.

This situation is not static; it may take several years for significant anti-war forces to emerge in an aggressor country. For example, it took three years for such forces to play a significant role in France during the Algerian war. Without losing sight of these forces and this scenario, we must for the time being rely on other tools.

*The objectives of Russian policy seem to be constantly redefined according to the balance of power.*







Today, there is no prospect of a bilateral peace that would put an end to this war of aggression against Ukraine.

### *In Ukraine*

Assuming that there is no positive outlook for a bilateral peace agreement in this war of aggression, i.e. a mutual compromise that could lead to the end of the conflict and the total withdrawal of Russian troops, our attention should be focused on the political and trade union forces engaged in the Ukrainian resistance against Putin's army and which, combined or not, are fighting against the attacks on social rights by the Zelensky government. Therefore, we advocate for an independent strategy of the Ukrainian working class and its allies to win this war. From this perspective, it is important to make clear that we are on the military front of the Ukrainian army, while politically differentiating ourselves from the government. If the war imposes limits on the military front and the powers that be, we must avoid the trap of national unity on which Zelensky relies. Such claims to national unity allows him to attack social and democratic rights in order to guarantee the profitability of the imperialists' investments, which will facilitate any future project of economic colonization. The limits are not always easy to determine from the outside, because it must be taken

into account that public expressions cannot be too openly critical of Zelensky, since this exposes militants of progressive organizations to repression or the possibility of being sent to participate in particularly risky military operations. These are the questions that can be asked of the Social Movement (*Sotsialnyi Rukh*), because, although they support the Ukrainian resistance, make progressive social demands, and criticize all imperialism, it is difficult to find in their program a clear rejection of Ukraine's integration into NATO or the European Union. Among the other active political organizations, there are also anarchist or anarcho-communist networks such as the Autonomous Union of Workers, but the trade unions seem to be the most interesting points of support on a mass scale. Within the KVPU, the confederation of free trade unions of Ukraine established in the big enterprises (railroads, urban transport, metallurgy, mines, energy, etc.) there are leaders who position themselves both in support of the Ukrainian resistance, but also in an anti-imperialist line and against attacks on the right to work. This is what most characterizes the above confederation.

In terms of those denouncing social setbacks in Ukraine, the work of the student union Direct Action (*Pryama Diya*) should be highlighted as they have condemned the Ukrainian government's policy towards students. They have carried out peaceful action campaigns and have contacted the French student movement to develop international solidarity.

The feminist movement is another component of the Ukrainian social resistance that needs support in order for progressive forces to have a stronger voice in the Ukrainian political landscape now and in the future. The Bilkis group links feminist issues with anti-capitalism.

## Which networks and which policy issues require specific support?

### *The International Labor Network of Solidarity and Struggle*

With the organization of two convoys to its credit, the ILNSS network offers the best prospects in terms of political orientation: direct material support to independent trade unions, denunciation of Zelensky's anti-social policies and Western imperialist depredations. However, its financial, logistical, and human resources require a strong development which will not be sufficient to respond to the needs of Ukrainian workers in the near future.

It is also worth mentioning in passing that some national trade union confederations are taking interesting initiatives, but without assuming an international and unitary dimension which could be assumed by the rank and file of these organizations. At the current time, in the absence of a centralization of initiatives independent of governments, participation in campaigns of political and material support aimed directly at the workers of Ukraine, as they are presented, seems to be the best perspective, but not the only one. It is therefore necessary to advance in the construction of a trade union front of unity

The Education International has expressed its solidarity with the Ukrainian education unions and supports these organizations, from Fred van Leeuwen's article on <https://www.ei-ie.org/>.



Through the imposition of reforms, the Ukrainian authorities continue to attack workers' and trade union rights. Photo by industriALL Global Union.

of action with the Ukrainian resistance in Europe and in the world, coordinating and amplifying solidarity initiatives that develop the capacity of the workers to act independently of the bosses and their governments.

### *The European Network of Solidarity with Ukraine*

This network is made up of organizations of various kinds: political, trade union, associative, etc. In particular, it organized a solidarity convoy in May 2022 and has since organized events in the countries where it is established. Although this network defends progressive positions on social issues (see the first page of the website), the initiatives it takes are less demanding than those of the ILNSS in terms of institutional independence. The activities that took place in France on the occasion of the first anniversary of the Russian invasion were even problematic. If the desire to develop links with the Ukrainian diaspora is to be explored, it is problematic that it is done without politically distinguishing itself from the openly pro-imperialist positions of the EU powers and the United States, which are also a potential threat to Ukrainian sovereignty. It is problematic to say the least to involve pro-NATO and very right-wing personalities such as Alain Madelin, or Bernard Guetta, or let the Ukrainian embassy finance the demonstration.



The workers' interventions during the meetings and the demonstration that took place on March 24 served, in fact, more as an endorsement by the workers of a framework whose general tone can be easily co-opted by the Ukrainian government for its needs in terms of national unity, or even by imperialist governments posing as saviors of the Ukrainian people. Moreover, the priority of the main actors of this network seems for the moment more focused on the constitution of a network of parliamentarians on a European scale than on the constitution of a network of direct solidarity between organizations of the social movement in European countries. If the RESU remains an interesting place for the circulation of information and contacts, it is advisable to get involved in it to the extent that it succeeds in specifying its attitude towards NATO, the European Union, and the Zelensky government.

### *In all our organizations*

The question of war in Ukraine is being debated in all the organizations and circles in which we intervene. Support for workers involved in the Ukrainian resistance is sometimes dismissed on the grounds of the risk of military escalation, as already mentioned in this article.

It is also often dismissed in the name of murky nuances that could be described as pacifism. Pacifism is not a strategy to be dismissed per se, as it is potentially effective in a given context. In Russia today, pacifism is progressive, but in the case of Ukraine and other countries, it is the opposite. The question of peace in Ukraine and the end of the war is becoming more and more pressing, but it is important to consider that this kind of peace be just and lasting. A peace that is imposed at the cost of annexing part of the Ukrainian territory, is the institutionalization of the military achievements of the Putin-led war, is a peace that legitimizes aggression and violence. We defend a peace without

annexations for a fully free and sovereign Ukraine and to achieve this peace it is necessary to militarily support the social forces that are capable of achieving it: the Ukrainian workers' resistance and its allies. To develop support for the Ukrainian resistance in the "public opinion," we must polemicize with those who hold Russia and NATO equally responsible for the war, and who erroneously draw parallels with the pacifism of the First World War. This was based on the ability of the socialist parties of Europe to call for a general strike in case of mobilization against their respective bourgeoisies, according to the principle of revolutionary defeatism. In the present situation, this framework for analyzing the war translates into an absence of policy towards the Ukrainian working class, which is abandoned to its fate in the face of the Russian aggressor and the depredations of the imperialists on the other side. This absence of policy is sometimes a sign of the propaganda bias of some organizations that may be waiting for the actors of the conflict to visit their websites, or that may be planning to send some leaflets to Russia or Ukraine by drone, but it is also sometimes a sign of what could be called "shameless campism." In some circles, Putin is seen as an opponent, or even as an alternative, to the main imperialisms; and taking a stand against the arming of the Ukrainian resistance by hiding behind a pacifist discourse allows one to avoid having to

International solidarity campaign of ILNSS with the resistance  
of Ukrainian workers



assume de facto support of the aggressor.



# In Britain, the working class is back

## Let's build democratic rank and file unions

*The strike wave started in June 2022 has seen many local, wild cat and regional strikes win substantial pay increases and, in many cases, better working conditions, such bus drivers and the Liverpool dock workers. The strikes continue, as does widespread solidarity from workers and neighborhoods. In May 2023, unless the government changes its line of attack, 750,000 workers can be on strike.*

International Socialist League: Danny James (RCN), Margaret McAdam (Unite), Martin Ralph (UCU), Eraldo Strumiello (UVW), Ashley Walker (USDAW/LGBTQI+), Matt Prittlewell (PCS)

### The context of the recent strike wave

The rise in energy, housing, household, food and non-alcoholic beverages<sup>1</sup> hit workers very hard, and just as predictions of economic recovery are being made, food and non-alcoholic beverages inflation jumped to 19.1% per year in March, and inflation overall was 10.1%. So, in some sectors, due to many reasons, including profiteering, profits are up. The Bank of England has put up interest rates 11 times in a row, to reach 4.25%, supposedly to control inflation with a daily repeated assertion that wage increases cause inflation. Such rate increases, however, hit mortgages and personal and small business loans.

As Karl Marx showed in the pamphlet *Value, Price and Profit*<sup>2</sup>, a speech by Marx to the First International Working Men's



UK's largest port at Felixstowe. Photo: The Inverness Courier.

Association in June 1865, capitalism does not operate by the will of capitalists. The ability to extract surplus-labor from workers is constantly interrupted by workers struggles, and the realisation of profit is rendered increasingly difficult by the laws of capitalist production was Marx will show later in *Capital*.

Not only capitalism leads inherently to cyclical crisis, unevenness between the

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/bulletins/consumerpriceinflation/february2023>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1865/value-price-profit/>



National nurses' union (RCN) strike day on April 30, 2023. PA Wire

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/royal-college-of-nursing-nhs-government-great-ormond-street-hospital-unions-b2329629.html>

## The National Health Service, education and other sectors are striking for better wages and against privatization. ■

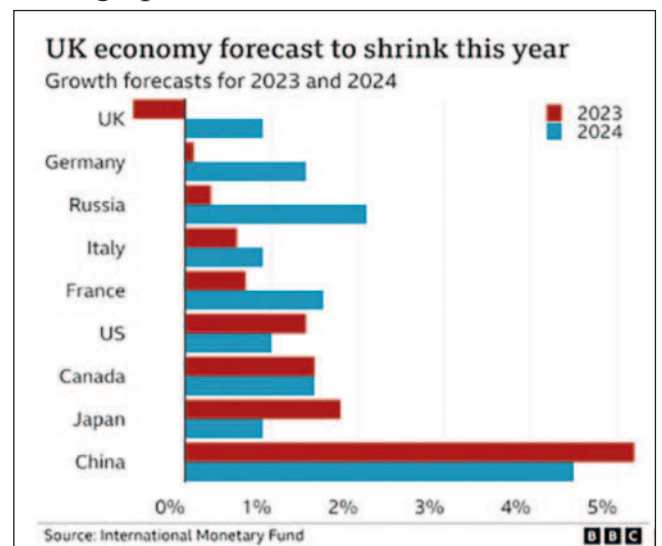
production and consumption, and environmental destruction; but its inner contradictions lead the system to constantly increase the rate of exploitation and attack workers' gains to address its crisis of profitability. It is crucial to study and not be fooled by gangster capitalism. Is there any other type in the UK?

In 2023 the UK may be the only country to shrink across all the advanced and emerging economies. Over the past two years, living costs have risen by 17.2%<sup>3</sup>.

At the end of 2022, average real terms pay in Britain had fallen among the fastest rates for more than two decades.<sup>4</sup> They were among the largest falls in growth since comparable records began in 2001.

## Public sector unions lead the strike wave

The current union fightback is centrally about money for public services. The government is refusing to increase treasury finance to pay for higher wages. Everyone knows this has been a tactic to run down the NHS (National Health Service), education and other public sectors for years. The Tory government, at the same time, has driven through privatisation.



<sup>3</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2023/apr/16/forecasters-scent-a-drop-in-inflation-but-look-how-wrong-they-have-been>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2023/jan/17/real-terms-uk-pay-fell-fastest-20-years>



As the strikes continue, tension increases between union members and leaders. In April, rank and file nurses of the RCN (Royal College of Nurses) had to fight their national leadership who had recommended a pitiful offer; 54% of those voting voted to reject. The rank-and-file health workers group *NHS Workers Say No!* fought for that. They have 30,000 followers across different health unions. The vote was an outstanding achievement. Officially the RCN pay demand is for 5% above inflation because nurses have lost £10,000 since 2008 as pay did not match inflation.

The outcome of the ballot in the NHS dispute whereby UNISON accepted the government's offer and the RCN rejected it has sharpened a debate that formed amongst RCN activists during the vote around Agenda for Change.

Agenda for Change is a pay grading system that covers virtually all workers – over one million – within the NHS.

It is increasingly felt in RCN ranks that nurses should seek to leave Agenda for Change in order to negotiate for pay and conditions independently of the rest of the NHS.

This is born from an increasing tension between RCN and UNISON members as this dispute has developed. UNISON is the largest union in the NHS, with over 400,000 healthcare workers in membership. However, this membership is overwhelmingly concentrated in the lower pay grades amongst admin, catering and domestic staff.

RCN activists widely predicted, (correctly, as it turns out), that UNISON members would accept any low offer by the government as soon as it was made. This is because the lower grades are on such low rates of pay that they take a 'zero risk' approach to any offers made. They take it simply because their pay is so low. However, this leaves the nursing profession in a difficult position.

Nottingham nurses strike, December 2022.

<https://www.nursingtimes.net/news/workforce/rcn-announces-48-hour-march-strike-in-major-escalation-of-action-16-02-2023/>



The University College Union (UCU) has been in conflict for over six months.

The RCN is still standing but is unable to fight for nurses alone; the system means that they are fighting for all grades through the Agenda for Change system. However, now that UNISON have left the field, the strength of those left in the fight is seriously diminished.

One can sympathize with the frustrations of RCN activists when they therefore argue that nursing needs to be out of the Agenda for Change in order not to be undermined by unions representing lower-paid workers who give up fighting from the beginning and instead be able to negotiate independently. However, this obviously raises the question of whether the RCN abandons lower-level workers and accepts a divide-and-conquer culture of bargaining.

It remains to be seen how this circle can be squared. The rank and file must continue to build across healthcare unions.

At the same time, joint actions with all unions on strike must be built, although the RCN leadership are against them, even with striking junior doctors.

The British Medical Association (BMA) is a professional body as well as a union and is not noted for its militancy. They are organising days of repeated strike action demanding a 35% pay increase to bring junior doctor pay back to 2008 levels, having lost £35,000 since then due to below inflation pay rises.

The National Education Union (NEU), representing some 450,000 teachers and support staff, has gained 57,000 members since January with several days of action in a dispute on pay. Their members have just rejected a further derisory offer and have announced more strike action in the coming weeks. This is against a backdrop of teacher shortages, crumbling school buildings and



chronic underfunding of children's education in the state sector.

The Public & Commercial Services (PCS) union representing some 193,000 workers in the state and private sector has also grown on the back of taking industrial action on pay and terms and conditions in government departments and associated bodies. There have now been several one day all out strikes, alongside the NEU and UCU in the first instance but also a rolling programme of more sustained, longer term targeted action in areas where this has the best immediate impact. A levy on members subs has been introduced to fund strike pay for those taking the longer periods of action, amongst them the lower paid.

There have been improved offers tabled in Scotland but notably not from the UK Government covering English workers. While the programme so far has been an improvement on previous 'hit and hope' one day national strikes, it remains to be seen if it can produce results. The action has not been wide enough, for a sustained period and coordination with other unions has been lacking.

PCS are currently reballoting members, as required by the latest version of the anti-union laws, and the result will provide a verdict from members as to whether the current strategy being pursued by the current leadership of PCS is up to the task.

The RMT (rail workers) mainline Network Rail workers were offered a two-year deal



that did not include driverless trains or closing ticket offices in the first year, but the offer did not match inflation. RMT workers voted 76% in favor of a deal that included a wage increase of 14% for the lowest paid grades and 9% for the highest paid, over two years, but the without matching inflation. The second-year part of the deal may see management bringing back the two demands. It was a long dispute, and support was dropping off in some areas, but maintenance workers are losing out greatly from the change to terms and conditions.

The RMT went to a ballot without a recommendation from the national leadership, so it was left to the individual RMT member to decide that angered RMT activists, for the leadership was refusing to put forward a real plan to escalate and widen the strike that would include greater strike coordinated days and making the constant demand on the TUC for a general strike in order to win all the demands, but instead transmitted to some of the ranks a sense of powerlessness.

Now a renewed long-term battle by RMT cleaners will mean national strikes in their sector.

The RMT is also discussing the threat of new technology to rail workers, including the use of driverless trains and buses. A parallel to when dock workers faced containerisation. The central point is without workers' control over the new

technology their gains will be undermined. A programme to face this question needs to be developed.

Meanwhile, taxpayer funds are directly turned into shareholder dividends. Public money pays to indemnify rail companies against losses arising from strike action and then £82 million were paid in dividends!

UCU (University College Union) has been in dispute for over six months now and it has just successfully achieved a new mandate for further strike action with record turnouts.

Like the nurses' dispute, the first six months of action frustrated many grassroots members as the leadership regularly adopted an approach that undermined the union's democratic structures and demobilised the strike action. This included snap e-ballots sent out to all with leading questions about whether or not strike action should continue, accompanied by patronising, propagandistic broadcasts that promoted the leadership's narrative and implied that the membership was afraid of taking strike action.

Fortunately, members again rejected this, demonstrating that members have not lost the appetite for action and are willing to fight the UCU leadership and their bosses to get their demands.

The next stage of the action involves a national marking and assessment boycott, which has proven a highly successful strategy in local disputes because it

Railway workers of the RMT on strike. Photo from [actualidad.rt.com](http://actualidad.rt.com).



effectively shuts down the university production line of students' degrees. It seems, for the time being at least, that the strength of grassroots members' campaigning has caused the leadership to halt its top-down, anti-democratic tactics and is back on board with the action.

The boycott commenced on 20<sup>th</sup> April, and already university bosses are panicking with threats of punitive 50%-100% deductions if members participate. However, as long as UCU leadership continues to trust members to run their dispute, there is a very real possibility that UCU's demands can be met and a sector-defining victory can be achieved.



### A typical example of militant action

More than 3000 National Express (NX) workers in the Unite union started an indefinite strike on 20 March 2023. This was the first bus strike in the region for thirty years across the West Midlands (including Birmingham, Coventry, and Wolverhampton). There was only a skeleton service to local hospitals running<sup>5</sup>. Salaries for NX workers fell in real terms by 6% between 2018-2021. Despite pre-tax profits of £146 million in 2022, NX was refusing to pay inflation linked wages or address serious concerns on safety and

terms and conditions as workers were angry. UnitetheUnion supported them, and an initial offer of 11% (plus a 2.3% one-off payment) increased to 14.3%. However, rejected the improved offer in a second ballot.

The strike started there was intimidation at picket lines, buses were prevented from leaving depots, the police were called out at least once. And many city's pickets received great support from activists and other striking workers.

Then an offer of 16.2% increase on the base rate for all current drivers plus improved conditions was made and accepted by the workforce. This is not the only example, different forms of indefinite strike action have been carried out successfully in many areas of the private sector over the last year.

### Precarious workers join the strike wave

There are two grassroots trade union for low-paid, migrant and precarious workers who are not in the TUC. One of them, the UVW (United Voices of the World), balloted 16 workplaces in April simultaneously, across nine different employers, to take part in coordinated strike action this summer.

This “mass coordinated strike includes Amazon warehouses, Mercedes showrooms, the London School of Economics, the Department for Education, a prestigious south London private school, Sage Nursing Home, luxury flats and major office blocks. This is set to be UVW's largest strike yet.”<sup>6</sup> On 21 April, migrant cleaners at two Mercedes showrooms won a 19.5% pay just before their ballot was to begin.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2023/march/national-express-blasted-for-union-busting-bullying-to-break-coming-strike-of-midlands-bus-workers/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.uvwunion.org.uk/en/news/2023/03/join-the-strike-wave-at-the-uvw-strikers-assembly-in-april/>



## Some first lessons: we need coordinated action and a general strike

The RCN, BMA, NEU, RMT, PCS unions are still organizing national strikes, and regional and local strikes are taking place in May. We can however draw some first lessons of a year of struggle. The first and most obvious one, is that militant strike action pays off, as workers who have fought have won drastic increases in the wage offers from the government.

The second lesson is that the power of the British working class has yet to be fully unleashed and developed, for union leaderships have so far failed to organize a nationally coordinated national strike, involving all sectors at once, and empowering the union spaces of self-organization of the ranks to take leadership of the strike. This is why it is key that the militant class struggle elements in the labour movement coalesce and unite their forces to demands more and better from their union leaders. On 1<sup>st</sup> February 2023, the TUC called for a day of action against

**T**here's money for NATO  
and big business, but not  
for workers. ■■

the proposed anti-trade union law. Five big unions coordinated their strike action on that day over all the strike issues. Many cities coordinated the actions sometimes through the local TUCs. The impact of that strike was immense and could be seen by the way the media covered the demonstrations and rallies. The power of the working class was glimpsed that day and should have been followed up with more and bigger days of joint action to bring all striking sectors together. But it has not happened yet.

The union leaders have not fought the TUC in any meaningful way to increase the number of coordinated strike days and the general strike demand does not exist, although Mick Lynch RMT leader did say they had to be a general strike to defeat the anti-trade union laws. But there have been only a few examples of campaigns by leaders in the rank and file to build a movement for a general strike.

Finally, this strike wave has shown that at the core of the economic demands lies a political question: what are the priorities of the current government? How come there is money for the big corporations and NATO and not enough for working people that can barely make ends meet. The strike wave is also revealing the need to build a political alternative in the country where workers have a say on the major policies and the economy, a worker's government.

## International solidarity

The strike wave has won attention and support across the world. One great example is the Liverpool Dock workers



RMT railroad workers protest. Photo: Steve Eason/ Flickr.com.



dispute that won inflation plus wage increases and better conditions. Dock worker representatives travelled to show solidarity, including from Chile and Barcelona. And many hundreds chanted “No Pasaran” when the pickets were told that any ship connected to Liverpool would not be handled in Spain.

Many unions linked to the International Labour Network of Solidarity and struggle have sent messages of solidarity, including from Europe, Latin America, Pakistan and India.

There are parallel attacks on health, education and workers’ rights throughout the world. Workers in all countries face a common enemy. Our comrades, brothers and sisters have more possibilities than before of building real effective rank and file international organisations as we fight back.

We also need to learn from class struggles in other countries such as France. *As UVW Executive Committee member, Eraldo*, said of the French strike movement “Little by

little workers self-organisation is advancing to make the existing strikes effective and lead them from the bottom up. Workers are also beginning to discuss how to extend the strike to more sectors, there are sectors that have begun to declare “wild strikes” without even following the necessary legal process, as is the case of the railway workers at the SNCF technical centre in Châtillon, which have inspired another railway centre in Lyon”.<sup>7</sup>

## Unions fight back against anti-LGBTQI+ attacks

There is important support for the strikes from LGBTQI+ groups. In Liverpool, for example, support for the RMT was organised by designing and selling a T-shirt and raised £1000 for the striker fund, because of their active support they spoke a number of times from the strike platforms. They also defended the rights of Trans and the demand for a general strike in their speeches to great applause.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.uvwunion.org.uk/en/news/2023/03/paris-in-springtime/>



The British government has been launching multiple attacks on the Transgender community, from blocking the Scottish government from making Trans people's lives easier, to restructuring services for young Trans people for being too supportive to those people and endlessly supporting and reinforcing incorrect anti-trans bigotry.

These attacks are motivated for several reasons, first and foremost the current Tory party currently in charge of the British government has always been a bastion for bigotry, secondly is clearly with the Tories failing to be seen as successful by the electorate in their traditional field of being 'good' on the economy, they are clearly instead turning to whipping up bigotry.

Labour under wannabe future prime minister Keir Starmer is following the same line but uses milder language. Starmer at the same time does not support pickets or promise a real pay rise for nurses.

Amongst the strikers there is wide support also for the immigrant communities. And they have mobilised against the racist and far right attacks on asylum seekers that have spread across the UK.

The British government has proposed sending migrants who cross the Channel to the United Kingdom to the Falkland Islands.

Photo: AFP and profile.com, May 7, 2023.

## The government blames the immigrants and builds the far-right

This Conservative government are intentionally whipping up anti-migrant feelings, supported by a gleeful and supine media, using scapegoats to draw attention away from an economic crisis of their making. We have a racist and cruel Home Secretary, Suella Braverman, backed by Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, using consciously inflammatory racist language and time-worn racist tropes about the state we are in - "invasion", "swarms", "Albanian criminals."

At the same time Braverman castigates anyone on the side of humanity, decency or equal rights - "activist blob of lefty lawyers", "out of touch lefties," in comparison to the "law-abiding patriotic majority who have said 'enough is enough'."

Referring to the 100 million displaced people worldwide, she makes the absurd suggestion that, "they are coming here," knowing that in reality the UK takes less than 1% of the global total.

The Illegal Migration bill, going through parliament which the Home Secretary acknowledges may be incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights, aims to remove the right to claim asylum in the UK to anyone who arrives 'irregularly', such as by crossing the Channel in a small boat. Anyone who arrives 'irregularly' will face immediate detention and removal back to where they have fled from or to a third country such as Rwanda, where a £120 million deal has been agreed. This bill reaches new heights of cruelty and oppression in the treatment of asylum seekers, with a complicit Prime



Minister who made one of his five pre-election pledges to stop men, women and children crossing the Channel to claim asylum without putting in place any safe and ‘legal’ routes.

The migration crisis is a disaster, and the asylum system is intentionally inefficient and chaotic in an economic system in crisis. In December 2022 there were 161,000 people awaiting an initial decision and over 4,000 people awaiting a review of their asylum application. There are 51,000 people being housed in hotels around the country. Now the government wants to use alternative accommodation in disused military barracks and prisons and on a giant metal barge - with 220 single bedrooms to house 500 male asylum seekers.

People have fled war, trauma and torture and thousands have lost their lives crossing the Channel and Mediterranean, they face abuse and appalling conditions in accommodation where there have been outbreaks of diphtheria, people awaiting a decision are languishing and are unable to work and move on with their already traumatised lives.

These government immigration policies are inhuman, but the Labour opposition only argue that they can do the same as the Conservatives but more effectively. It came down to a popular Match of the Day presenter, Gary Lineker, to take a moral stand and use his voice to object publicly to the racist language being used and to condemn the bill as immeasurably cruel and disproportionate.

Braverman and Sunak’s use of violent, incendiary language encourages and emboldens far-right parties to spread their hatred and division by preying on the fears of poor and impoverished areas.

Demonstrations, many organised by the far-right, have been targeting asylum hotel accommodation across the country with intimidation and mob violence. In response, trade unions are urging workers to mobilise against the far right and blame senior Conservatives for stoking the flames of hatred and division by condoning the protests, their use of racist rhetoric and racist policies.

People will not stop fleeing war and persecution in search of safety and will continue to travel to the UK by whatever means are available to them. It is likely that the Bill, like the Rwanda deal, will face many legal challenges before, if at all, anything changes, as many experts have declared – it is unworkable. What we are seeing are performative politics – a distraction by a cruel, malicious and vindictive government who are appealing to the so called Red-Wall voters. The government is manufacturing a migration crisis and their eyes are set on the next election.

### Anti-union laws and anti-protest laws

Rishi Sunak’s new anti-trade union legislation is aimed at destroying strikes, so far, the existing anti-union laws have failed



Sunak and Braverman use violent language against immigrants that emboldens far-right parties. Photos: Reuters, on [aristeguinoticias.com](https://www.aristeguinoticias.com)



to stop them. Such is the Tory crisis that workers' actions (and the deepening economic crisis) brought down Tory favourite (who won the last general election), Boris Johnson, last summer.

Sunak wants to bring in a Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act to further shackle the unions before his premiership is seriously threatened. Top employment lawyers have said that it will make the UK 'one of the most difficult countries in the democratic world in which to go on strike and may breach treaty obligations'<sup>8</sup>.

Such a law gives employers the ability to make unions requisition striking workers if their sector is covered by minimum service level restrictions, for example on the railways, in health or education. Such a law would force unions to name union members to break the strike they voted for.

This follows the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act (PCSC) which became law in September 2022. It imposes many restrictions on the right to protest. The police can stop demonstrations if, amongst other things, they think they are too noisy, or if a peaceful protest is disrupting businesses from carrying out normal activities<sup>9</sup>.

Unified action of strikes and demonstrations is the only way to defeat this attack, but the TUC is not organising any major offensive. It means the rank and file have to build and demand that a national plan of action to challenge the leadership to fight the anti-union and anti-struggle laws.

## The Tory government must go

The Tories are trying to find the way to divert and stop the strike wave. In addition to the anti-trade union laws, they are legislating against immigrants. They are deepening the problems facing immigrants while ramping up the rhetoric to deflect the blame for the current cost of living crisis. This is also the reason for the current 'Culture War' being fought by the most odious figures on the Right, inside and outside the Tory Party. They are also giving fascists a helping hand.

This is why the strike wave and workers in general must take the lead to defend all immigrants, fight the immigration controls and the rise of the far right. This also includes mobilizing labor and community organisation to build active solidarity with the Ukrainian resistance to the Russian invasion in an independent manner.

The strike movement needs to co-ordinate action and build for a general strike. Many workers on pickets have agreed with this idea, but, just like the RCN nurses, there needs to be rank and file struggle and organisation against the national leaderships who never mention or are opposed to striking as one.

The great challenge for the rank and file is building a militant, democratic, internationalist and permanent organisations to fight for pay, conditions



The House of Commons (British Parliament), London. Photo: /Jessica Taylor/Handout via REUTERS.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/mar/31/rishi-sunaks-anti-union-laws-would-make-uk-international-outlier-lawyers-say>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/12/what-is-the-law-on-the-right-to-protest-in-the-uk>



and to remove all privatisation. And build together with all the oppressed and working-class neighbourhoods to unify the important issues pushing workers into the fight against a hated government.

One feature of the rise of the struggle of workers in all continents is the international context in which they take place. Today, more than ever in its history, the evolution of capitalist exploitation brings international questions before every serious struggle of workers. Transnationals exploit the globe. Everywhere the ruling classes and their governments in East and West are engaged in an attack on the conquests which the working class have won. The attacks on health, education, and welfare are global. Flexibility of labour, uncertain working hours, repressive contracts, are everywhere, with the repression of working-class rights backed in most countries by legal curbs on workers' organisations and workers' struggles.

Nurses and paramedics are staging the biggest strike in the history of the British public health system to get pay rises, while the government says it has no money. Source: RTVE.es/ Agencies.

- ***Support coordinated action and a general strike!***
- ***Mobilise to defeat the anti-union and anti-immigration laws!***
- ***Immigrant and indigenous workers are one working class!***



Protests in the UK against the deportation of migrants to Rwanda.  
Photo: NIKLAS HALLE'N/A via Getty Images.



# 2023 Elections in Spain:

## It's time to take stock of the PSOE-UP coalition government<sup>1</sup>

Laura R. Corriente Roja (Spanish State)

Since the beginning of the year, a wave of strikes - with its epicenter in France - has spread to several European countries, with mobilizations and protests against inflation, wage and pension cuts, and the dismantling of the public sector. Healthcare strikes have also been a common element in the aftermath of the pandemic.

Meanwhile, in Spain the leaderships of the majority trade unions CCOO and UGT - which have not called a general strike for a decade - boast of the *social peace* achieved thanks to their shameful agreements with the government on labor and pension reforms. They have not even managed to call solidarity rallies with the French working class, or to initiate any solidarity activity with the Ukrainian workers' resistance.

In a 2023 marked by elections, the government, which has been campaigning for months, continues with its propaganda.

With its characteristic self-aggrandizement it boasts of having improved pensions, having the lowest inflation in Europe, having achieved more social rights, and more and better jobs than before.

### There is an abyss between the "progressive" narrative and reality

However, their story is one thing, and the harsh reality that we the working class live on a daily basis is another. The government makes up its statistics and when it talks about the benefits of its **labor reform**, it hides the fact that most of the new hires are fixed-term, discontinuous, or part-time, which implies miserable salaries that are impossible to live on. Moreover, with this reform, layoffs continue to be easy and cheap, so having a permanent contract is no guarantee of anything.



<sup>1</sup> UP: these are the initials of the coalition which includes Izquierda Unida and Podemos.

Despite its promises, it has kept the most harmful aspects of Rajoy's reform intact, which it promised so many times to repeal. In short, a reform which, with the enthusiastic support of employers, has come to legitimize precarity. The official temporary employment rate has fallen, but it is still above the European average, and there is a chronic rate of unemployment of 3 million registered workers (real unemployment is much higher), which affects 30% of young people.

**Wage devaluation** has been deepening since before the pandemic, and even working full time, many people are poor. In 2022, salaries under collective bargaining agreements increased by an average of 2.8%, compared to an average inflation rate of 8.4%, which represents the greatest loss of purchasing power in more than two decades.

The price of energy continues to soar this year, and food prices rose 16% in February. The energy companies, distribution companies, and the big supermarket chains are making a fortune with speculation and the permissiveness of the government. This is all happening at the expense and impoverishment of working-class families for whom the rise in basic necessities represents a higher percentage of spending than for more affluent households.

The same can be said of the price of **rents and mortgages**, which have not stopped rising. If in 2022 there was an average of 109 evictions per day, 80% of which affected families with children, this year it is predicted that they will increase even more.

The Housing Law, which after a year and a half of negotiations is expected to be passed in May to use as an electoral weapon, does not include housing as a basic right. It is a shame that the Spanish State continues to have one of the smallest social housing stocks in Europe, reaching **barely 2.5% of the total. Whereas Sareb or the bad bank, has sold tens of thousands of empty homes, which were paid for with public money in the bank bailout of the previous crisis at bargain prices to vulture funds (investment funds).**

In 2022, public pensions rose by 2.5% (3% in the case of minimum and non-contributory pensions), which is well below inflation, so that with the 8.5% rise in inflation in 2023, they will not recover their purchasing power. In addition, 6 out of 10 contributory pensions are below 1,000 euros per month.

The new **pension reform**, tied to the delivery of the next batch of European







funds, continues on the path of tightening the conditions for access to a public pension from the 2021 reform and those of previous governments. And while it increases the number of years that must be contributed to collect 100% pension, it does so gradually, to avoid protests as in France. It is a trap because the plan will be revised and potentially changed in 2025. Meanwhile, private pensions in their different variants, negotiated in agreements and managed by the employers and the unions themselves, are being promoted with the participation of the "big" trade union confederations.

After the pandemic, public services, especially health care, have continued to deteriorate and become increasingly privatized. Waiting lists and lack of personnel have turned health care into an ordeal. Amid the protests and strikes, the deterioration of salaries and working conditions has generated a brain drain as hospital staff have gone to work elsewhere. Weighed down by budget cuts since 2008, more than 6,000 doctors in primary care and some 100,000 nursing positions are needed to reach the European average, plus 80,000 professionals will retire in the next ten years.

Sixty-three percent of private hospitals have agreements with the **public health system**, with Madrid standing out as one of the regional governments with the most contracts with the private sector. The same is true of **homes**

Demonstration in defense of public pensions in Madrid. Olmo Calvo, in an article by Mikel De la Fuente - Viento Sur.



Demonstration against the pension reform. Photo: EFE at <https://www.elconfidencial.com/>

**for the elderly**, 70% of which are private, but 62.7% of the spots held for residents are financed with public funds. It was precisely in nursing homes that more than 35,000 people died during the pandemic.

Although most of the direct responsibility lies with the regional governments, the deterioration of healthcare would not be possible without Law 15/97, which opened the door to privatization and which the central government has done nothing to repeal. It has also allowed large multinationals to continue doing business in residential care.

This situation has hit especially hard the most oppressed sectors of the class such as women, immigrants, and youth, who continue to take the lead in rates of poverty, unemployment, and job insecurity. All the while inequality and violence deepen, as an expression of the barbarism to which this decomposing capitalist system is leading us.

In contrast, with this government the fortunes of the billionaires have grown at a rate of 3 million euros a day since 2020. According to a report by the Bank of Spain, corporate

profits grew in 2022 seven times more than salaries. The six largest banking institutions earned more than 20.8 billion and the seven largest energy companies earned net profits of 54 million euros per day. Not bad for a government that claims to govern for "the social majority" (we are the working class, but both government partners are allergic to this word, which is why they prefer to talk about "*civil society*," "*citizens*", or as they say now, "*the working middle class*").

With this "progressive" government, we are not even guaranteed the real right to strike. Today it is prohibited in practice in many sectors such as health or transport by means of the abusive requirement for "minimum services" that prevent its exercise. When a labor conflict arises, the union bureaucracy is in charge of isolating and crushing it whenever possible.

### Lessons from a "progressive" legislature"

In this context, on May 28 there will be municipal and regional elections throughout the country. And we will have general elections at the end of the year. And once again, the PSOE and its partner UP, as well as the rest of the organizations that have come to be called the "progressive left," will argue that it is necessary to give them our vote to stop the advance of the right and the far-right.

And yet, wherever that left has governed, and

especially in the central government these past three years, UP has been an accomplice or directly an architect of the umpteenth labor and pension reform in favor of the bosses. They have allowed the drama of evictions, forced deportations, and the criminal border policy to continue. They have allowed attacks on the most basic democratic rights, and have maintained all of the repressive legacy of previous governments, including the Gag Law<sup>2</sup>, which they have not repealed. In addition, they have contributed to the dismantling and privatization of the public sector, which accelerated after the pandemic.

Beyond some symbolic gestures and protests, they have approved a huge increase in military spending, but this has not been to arm the Ukrainian resistance as the European governments claim, but rather in the service of NATO's imperialist plans to which this government has given itself wholeheartedly.

The UP together with the PSOE, has become co-manager of the plans of the bourgeoisie, to whom they have given millions of euros during the pandemic and the crisis. And what they have given us with the left hand - some measures of social support and redistribution of wealth, far removed from real social needs - they have taken away from us with the right hand. An example is the Minimum Vital Income, presented with great fanfare as a "historic" measure, which has not solved in any way the plight of thousands of impoverished families.



In these three years, they have maintained the insulting fiscal, budgetary, and educational privileges of the Catholic Church, and tolerated fascist exhibitions. They have allowed the continued use of all state apparatuses against

The PSOE government and Unidas Podemos.

Photo: Dani Duch for La Vanguardia, 14/11/2019.

<sup>2</sup> Translator's Note: In Spanish, la *Ley Mordaza*, this law places restrictions on when and where protests can take place, among other draconian measures. See: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/15/journalists-take-fight-against-spanish-gag-law-to-european-court>



the right to self-determination of the people. They have allowed the judiciary to intervene in political life or even paralyze parliamentary activity every time the privileges of its social minority and this unjust social order have been threatened. Forty years later, the new Law of Historical Memory is a new performative and empty gesture that does not even repeal the previous **Amnesty Law**<sup>3</sup>, which equates victims and executioners. And they have not touched this corrupt, imperialist, and rancid monarchy imposed by Franco.

The laws passed by this government to maintain its propaganda that theirs is a *feminist and progressive* government are not enough either, and the few genuine reforms that they have managed to accomplish do not have the necessary budget. The UP has continued to remain in the government, even after the PSOE registered a bill on its own to modify the Integral Law for the Guarantee of Sexual Freedom. This is one of the "star" laws of Podemos in this legislature which received the mandate from the streets.

In short, all the measures of the UP in government have not gone beyond posturing for the media. Far from turning the PSOE to the left, the UP has been integrated into the framework and limits of the monarchical

regime and its institutions, and in said institutions lie all its political aspirations. **With this, they have finished burying the task that the 15M<sup>4</sup> put on the table in 2011: to break with the monarchic regime and with institutions inherited from Francoism and to open a constituent process that would put an end to the prison of nations that is the Spanish State.**

It is in this lack of leadership on the *left* and in its failure to fulfill its promises that we must look for the causes of the right and the far-right gaining a foothold in some working-class neighborhoods where it is growing and gaining an audience.

### Sumar, the new project of reformism without reforms

On April 2, the launch of "Sumar" took place at the state level. A new political project headed by Yolanda Díaz of the Communist Party of Spain (PCE), it aspires to be an umbrella for the institutional left in competition with Podemos. In it, Díaz announced her intention to run as head of the list of said political platform.

<sup>3</sup> Translator's Note: This 1977 law shields participants in the Franco regime from prosecution for human rights violations.

<sup>4</sup> Translator's Note: 15th of May Movement, or the Indignados, occupied public squares throughout Spain beginning in 2011 to protest austerity measures related to the Spanish financial crisis caused by the Great Recession in 2008.

Demonstration against the gag law in Madrid. EFE/  
LUCA PIERGIOVANNI, on rtve.es



Yolanda Díaz, daughter and niece of trade unionists and a labor lawyer, is currently Minister of Labor and Second Vice-President of the coalition Government supported by Podemos. As minister, she has boasted of having implemented a Labor Reform that "is being studied in all the universities of the world." At the moment, the polls place her as one of the leading politicians of the left and of the Government. She knows this and takes great care of her image. No "noise or confrontation." It is no coincidence that in her speech on April 3, the leader of Sumar did not talk about the war in Ukraine or the mobilizations in France. Nor were there any references to the working class in her speech. Hers is a project which she says is directed "*to the citizens,*" "*to broaden democracy*", "*to weave a different, democratic, modern, feminist project for the country and to raise the flag of hope and optimism, from the left*".

And so that no one is misled, she makes clear from the beginning her intention to renew the coalition government with the PSOE, whose policies she has been pursuing for the last three years. In this respect, her strategy is identical to that of Podemos, which went at supersonic speed from pretending to *break the game* to settling for being the left wing of the PSOE. Sumar is its natural continuity, in a different moment and with more submission, if possible, to this one.

It is no longer a question of redirecting the struggles and mobilizations that arose after 15M, which questioned the two-party system, this corrupt regime, and this false democracy. Rather, the focus is now on channeling the discontent, the fear of the right, and the vote of resignation to the lesser evil, in order to recreate a new "progressive government" within the framework of the bourgeois regime.

In the absence of a concrete name and program, Sumar is the maximum expression of the new reformism without reforms. Unlike the social-democratic reformist project of the 19th century, or the one which, after the



Yolanda Díaz. Photo by Thomas COEX (AFP), in the article by Daniel Galvalizi for nais.eus

Second World War, implemented the Welfare State in a devastated Europe which had to be rebuilt, the new reformism in times of savage capitalism has hardly any partial conquests to offer to the working class beyond some crumbs and cosmetic measures which leave the structures of power intact. After the debacle of Ciudadanos and the persistence of Vox, we are *back to square one*. To a new *imperfect two-party system*, supported from outside.

Faced with their project of voting for the PSOE directly or "deferred" to guarantee demobilization and social peace, from Corriente Roja and the IWL, we reaffirm that there are no shortcuts based on building electoral apparatuses. We need to build a revolutionary force rooted in the workers, popular movements, and among the youth.

We need an organization whose work in the institutions is to promote the extra-parliamentary struggle to corrode them from within, for the benefit of a true workers' democracy. And whose objective is to develop active international solidarity with the peoples in struggle, and to gather the discontent and social indignation that today is expressed in a disorganized way, to impose from below a program of transformation that responds to the economic, social, ecological, and health disaster, and to open the road towards a government of the workers. This is the only one that can alter the foundations of this system that crushes us, and lead us towards a socialist future.



# Italy

## The far-right government and workers' struggles

*In September 2022, Italy held parliamentary elections—elections in which representatives are chosen— and, for the first time in the history of the Italian Republic (the Republic born after the fall of Fascism following the Second World War), a far-right party obtained the majority of votes. In fact, Fratelli d'Italia, the party of Giorgia Meloni, reached 26% of the votes and then formed, together with Forza Italia (Berlusconi) and the Lega (Salvini), a right-wing government presided over by Giorgia Meloni herself*

Fabiana Stefanoni, PdAC (Italy)

**I**t should be noted that there were high levels of abstention, as only 64% of the electorate voted. It should also be noted that in Italy it is very complicated to obtain citizenship: there are more than 5 million foreigners residing in Italy who cannot exercise the right to vote. Let us try to understand what Giorgia Meloni's party is and, above all, how she has managed to reach Government with such a broad consensus.

### From MSI to Fratelli d'Italia

Fratelli d'Italia was born in 2012 from a split of Popolo della Libertà (PdL), founded in 2009 by Silvio Berlusconi, the notoriously macho businessman who managed to rule Italy for about 9 years. Giorgia Meloni and her entourage come from Alleanza Nazionale (the most right-wing component of the PdL), which emerged from the former Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI). Meloni herself had been Minister of Youth in Berlusconi's fourth government. In its symbolism, Meloni's party continues to refer to the MSI.



Giorgia Meloni. Photo: <https://www.politico.eu/article/far-right-italy-giorgia-meloni-europe-conservateurs-veulent-une-pièce/>

But what was the MSI? Founded in the immediate post-war period, the MSI was intended to give political representation to all those nostalgic for Mussolini and the old regime, although it did not explicitly declare itself Fascist. In fact, the new Italian Constitution, which came into force on January 1, 1948, forbade the

"reorganization, under any form, of the dissolved Fascist party." This prohibition that was evidently easily circumvented, as evidenced by the fact that the MSI was founded by former leaders of the Republic of Salò (the State founded by Mussolini in close collaboration with the Nazis in September 1943, after Italy joined the Allied front, and thousands of striking workers were deported to Nazi concentration camps during the years of the Republic of Salò). Giorgio Almirante, leader of the MSI, much admired by Meloni (who described him on social networks as "a great man we will never forget"), had been a minister in the Republic of Salò, and a trusted collaborator of Mussolini and Hitler.

At that time, Italy was experiencing a revolutionary upheaval and a civil war with the participation of the so-called Italian Resistance, characterized by a large participation of workers and youth (the "partisans," with mass armament. The reformist (Italian Socialist Party, PSI) and Stalinist (Italian Communist Party, PCI)

Meloni and Draghi. Source : <https://www.subrayado.com.uy/giorgia-meloni-premiere-femme-dirigeant-l-italie-assume-officiellement-son-poste-n882267>



Palmiro Togliatti, leader of the PCI and Stalin's man in Italy.  
Photo from [blogdaboitempo.com.br](http://blogdaboitempo.com.br)

leaderships of the workers' movement betrayed that movement by voting in favor of a bourgeois constitution that returned the leadership of the country to the capitalists who, until a few years before, had done business in collaboration with the Fascists. PCI leader Togliatti, Stalin's man, became Minister of Justice for two years, promulgating an amnesty decree for the Fascists.

It was also thanks to the collaboration of the "communist" (Stalinist) leaders that the former fascist leaders, responsible for the death of thousands of workers, as well as Jews and political prisoners in the Nazi concentration camps, were able to reconstitute their own party, the MSI.







Meloni at the national Congress of the CGIL union.

Over the years, just as the PCI evolved from a workers' party into a fully bourgeois party (today's Democratic Party, Elly Schlein's PD, born of the merger with the Catholics of Christian Democracy), the MSI also gradually became a liberal nationalist right-wing party (Alleanza Nazionale). Fratelli d'Italia recovers some aspects of its identity (above all, as we shall see, in the area of "family" and in the denial of civil rights).

## From Draghi to Meloni

After Meloni's electoral victory, the international press described the new government as "the most right-wing since Mussolini." It is true that the current government coalition, due to the weight of Fratelli d'Italia, is an extreme right-wing government, racist, xenophobic, sexist, and strongly opposed to the demands of the LGBTQ+ movements. At the same time, contrary to what some sectors of the left have commented, it is not really a "fascist" government. Rather, it is a government that is part of the bourgeois democratic system, loyal to NATO and the European Union, and at the same time characterized by an accentuation of repressive and reactionary policies.

One thing must be made clear: Meloni's electoral success did not fall from the sky.

It is the fruit of years of policies of ferocious attack on the popular masses and the working class at the hands of governments led by the PD, in deference to Troika (IMF, ECB and European Commission), that is to say, to the demands of large European capital. The PD-led governments have been the ones that have launched the harshest attacks against pensions, against the purchasing power of wages, even against trade union and strike rights (Italy has one of the harshest anti-strike laws in the EU, in many sectors it is forbidden to strike for more than one day). The policies pursued by the governments during the pandemic have further aggravated the conditions of the working class and impoverished broad layers of the petty bourgeoisie, and Meloni has fanned the flames of discontent in these sectors. The impressive recent electoral growth of this party - in 2013, when FdI ran in the elections for the first time, it obtained only 1.9% of the vote - is due in particular to its "opposition" to the Draghi government.

Draghi, former President of the European Central Bank, the direct expression of aggressive European financial capital, despite not being a member of the Italian Parliament, was appointed in February 2021 by the President of the Republic to form a Government of national unity. The objective was to manage the interests of the Italian bourgeoisie in agreement with the European institutions in a very difficult

## Lagarde, the president of the ECB and even NATO see the Fratelli d'Italia as a reliable ally. ■

context, characterized by the worsening of the economic crisis due to the effects of the pandemic. All the parties present in parliament - led by the Democratic Party, the main architect of the governmental operation - supported Draghi, with the sole exception of Fratelli d'Italia (and some minor distinctions by a couple of deputies of the liberal-reformist left -Sinistra Italiana - who made a very timid opposition). Meloni thus appeared as the only critical voice in Parliament towards Draghi's government, precisely at a time when the latter was applying fierce anti-labor policies. Draghi, among other things, withdrew the law that partially restricted the possibility of dismissal during the COVID emergency, thus unleashing a wave of layoffs in the workforce.

Meloni's "opposition" to the Draghi government has been more lip service than real, with an anti-European rhetoric centered on racism and xenophobia. Among Fratelli d'Italia's favorite arguments, in tune with those of Salvini's Lega, is the defense of the homeland against the "invasion" of immigrants. At the same time, in the face of the indignation of the broad masses - workers and the petty bourgeoisie - against the Draghi government and its policies, the consensus has grown disproportionately towards the only apparently critical voice: Meloni.

All this explains why, although Fratelli d'Italia is a petty-bourgeois party, even broad sectors of the working class - at least those who voted - gave their electoral support to Meloni. This led to the formation in October 2023 of an extreme right-wing government led by Giorgia Meloni but also involving the Lega of the racist Salvini and Berlusconi.



The far-right government of Meloni, Berlusconi and Salvini.

Photo: The Conversation.

## The new government's policies

As has already happened in Europe in the case of other populist parties that grew in the wake of the crisis of the bourgeois order, once in government Meloni's party abandoned its opposition to the European Union. From the beginning, there was no lack of handshakes and mutual compliments between the new Prime Minister Meloni and Lagarde (current president of the ECB). Compliments to Meloni also came from NATO staff, who see a reliable ally in the Fratelli d'Italia.

The government's first financial law is in continuity with that of previous governments, defending the interests of big capital. It is reducing even the crumbs reserved for the working classes (for example, unemployment benefits), demonstrating that, when they come to government, the petty-bourgeois parties certainly do not break with big capital.

The new government immediately implemented a series of measures typical of the far right. Here are the most significant ones. La Russa and Fontana, both known for their numerous reactionary and anti-LGBT statements, were elected presidents of the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies respectively. La Russa is known for keeping busts of Mussolini in his house and for having more than once made the Roman salute (the typical fascist salute) on public



occasions. Recently, speaking of the Ardeatine massacre (where the Nazis killed 335 people in retaliation), he implied that the responsibility lay with the partisans who had - in his own words! - "beat up a gang of semi-retired people in Via Rasella." For those who do not know, in 1944 in Via Rasella in the middle of the civil war and during the Nazi occupation, 33 soldiers of a Nazi regiment under SS command were killed by partisans. The Nazis took revenge with the Ardeatine massacre, which is still very vivid in the memory of Italian anti-fascists. Fontana, on the other hand, president of the Chamber of Deputies, is known for his anti-LGBT and anti-abortion comments; he is a Catholic fundamentalist who has organized several meetings in defense of the traditional family.

The Meloni government has also immediately tightened xenophobic and repressive laws. An anti-rave decree has been enacted that harshly punishes musical gatherings of young people with years in prison and, at the time of writing, a law is being debated that punishes young environmentalists who, in protest against the rising climate crisis, symbolically throw washable paint on the city's monuments with heavy fines and even imprisonment. Xenophobic laws have also been made stricter with the tightening of the "Salvini decrees" (enacted in 2018 and reinforced since by the successive governments), which further hinder the reception of

refugees. The massacre of Cutro (Crotone, in the south of the country), where 91 migrants (including several children) died 150 meters from the shore because they were not rescued, aroused much indignation among the masses. The government did not make any self-criticism and, in fact, subsequently the Minister of Agriculture, Lollobrigida (Meloni's sister-in-law, by the way), spoke of the risk of "ethnic substitution" in Italy. It should be remembered that tens of thousands of immigrants have died in the Mediterranean in recent years and that PD-led governments have not pursued very different policies, making themselves responsible, like the Meloni government, for numerous state massacres.

On the very May Day Meloni summoned her ministers to vote for a labor law that would cut the unemployment benefits. To all this we must add the statements of the Minister of Education, Valditara. In response to a fascist attack in front of a school by a group of right-wing students against some students from a collective who were distributing a pamphlet, the Minister not only neglected to criticize the attack, but he himself attacked (with the threat of sanctions) the school principal for having sent the students a note criticizing what had happened and recalling the ever present risk of the spread of fascism...

## Class opposition to the government

Despite the bourgeois and reactionary character of this government, at the time of writing we are not witnessing a rise in mass mobilization that would be

Thousands of Italians take to the streets to demand a law against homophobia. Source: REUTERS/David W Cerny/ File Photo: REUTERS/David W Cerny/File Photo.





Protest of GKN workers.

<https://www.partidodialternativacomunista.org/articoli/sindacato/gkn-non-si-tocca-al-fianco-degli-operai-del-collettivo-di-fabbrica-gkn>

necessary to challenge it. In our opinion, this apparent social peace is explained by a combination of factors. In the first place, the present trade union (and political) leaderships of the labor movement have put the brakes on the mobilization of the working class. In Italy, there are three major trade union centers (CGIL, CISL and UIL) which bring together millions of workers. In particular, the CGIL (which includes FIOM, the metalworkers' constituent) exercises great control over the traditionally most militant sectors of the working class. In the past, the CGIL leadership was linked to the Stalinist PCI, while now it has developed a policy of total conformity with the PD governments. Moreover, over the years these apparatuses have accentuated their bureaucratic dimension and their collaboration with the State. In fact, they manage a series of services on behalf of the State apparatuses, including tax returns, a management which allows them to enrich themselves considerably (the budgets of these unions are often higher than those of the enterprises).

That is also why they have done nothing to

raise the level of confrontation with the governments, including the right-wing ones. Since the installation of the Meloni government, the CGIL has organized very few strikes and a few symbolic demonstrations, aimed more at celebrating the election of the new secretary Elly Schlein to the leadership of the PD than at challenging the government.

The most conspicuous thing the CGIL leadership did was invite the far right-wing prime minister to the trade union congress, letting her speak from the stage. This action was accompanied only by faint protests from some of the delegates.

To the nefarious role as provocateurs played by the union leaderships must be added the absence of a diverse and militant leadership in the factories and strategic sectors of the working class. The alternative unions are small and often in competition with each other, incapable of initiating united and radical fighting actions; they also lack a revolutionary political leadership with mass influence (the revolutionary leadership that Alternativa Comunista is trying to build).



This does not mean that there has been a lack of workers mobilizations in these months of government. The workers of the former airline Alitalia (now Ita), led by a comrade of Alternativa Comunista (Daniele Cofani), have launched one of the most participatory struggles of recent years against the privatization of the company (with numerous strikes and demonstrations). Formed in a militant and unitary committee (Tutti a Bordo - no Ita) they joined forces with the Gkn workers in Florence who had been fired by the boss who preferred to transfer production abroad. The Gkn workers also formed a factory committee, giving rise to various mobilizations both in the region and on a national scale.

Mention should also be made of the important role played by the Fronte di Lotta No Austerity (FLNA), which seeks to overcome the fragmentation of Italian trade unionism by uniting important vanguard sectors of the working class. These include Pirelli workers (the FLNA has been joined by Pirelli workers from the main Italian factories, organized by a comrade of Alternativa Comunista, Diego Bossi) to the Cub railway workers (who have organized



some national strikes with a large number of participants), and from the Stellantis workers (Slai Cobas) to the Ferrari workers (FIOM).



The winds of class struggle blowing in France have not yet reached Italy, but Alternativa Comunista is on the front lines in the attempt to relaunch the class struggle here too, against this government, and for a revolutionary and socialist alternative.



# Portugal

## The social crisis is increasingly becoming the political crisis of António Costa's government/PS

*It has been 10 years since Portugal and the whole of Europe faced a period of deep economic, social, and political crisis that is fundamental to understanding the situation of the European continent today. That is why we begin this article by framing how the current Socialist Party (PS) government in Portugal came about and developments at the level of working-class struggles, in order to better understand what is happening in the country today.*

Maria Silva, Em Luta (Portugal)

### From Geringonça to the current government of António Costa

Between 2011 and 2014, Portugal had a right-wing majority government (PSD/CDS), led by Passos Coelho and Paulo Portas, which implemented harsh austerity measures in the country following directives from the so-called Troika (ECB, EU, and IMF). Despite several general strikes, and huge mobilizations across the country (the largest since the 1974-75 revolution), which reversed some of the most severe measures, the workers and the poorest population were unable to defeat the government. In fact, both the Portuguese Communist Party, which led the trade union struggles at the time, and the Left Bloc, which headed the main social movements, channeled this huge process towards the elections. Thus, in the 2015 elections, they won a resounding victory, adding close to 20% of the votes between the two parties.



Striking tanker drivers observe a fuel depot in Aveiras, a suburb of Lisbon. Photo: AP/Armando Franca, File 12/8 /2019.

The Socialist Party, for its part, due to the bad reputation of the governments led by José Sócrates until 2011, had entered into such a crisis that it failed to win the elections in 2015. However, the PS proposed an alternative Governance agreement to the PCP (Communist Party of Portugal) and the BE (Bloco de Esquerdas), which finally materialized in the so-called "Geringonça," an electoral coalition branded as a gimmick in which the Socialist Party, led by António Costa,



governed between 2015 and 2019 with the support by the PCP and the BE. This Geringonça was unable to reverse the austerity applied by Troika, and kept Portugal as a peripheral and dependent country focused on servility to multinationals, to which it supplies mostly cheap labor.

PCP and BE supported several budgets and fed into the discourse of lesser-evilism and claimed they were going to achieve important advances that never materialized. They supported the government when it repressed striking workers, and when it announced a state of emergency, as in the case of the hazardous materials drivers, the Setúbal stevedores, or the nurses.

In 2019, the PS recovered from its crisis and won the election. It stopped wanting a Geringonça, instead making occasional pacts with different parties in parliament on the left and right. The PCP and BE were hostages to the discourse of lesser-evilism that they had built those years: they saved the PS, which used them to pose as a left-wing party, while governing for the bosses and the EU as always.

Faced with the erosion of its position and the lack of dialogue and concessions from the PS after 2021, the PCP and BE decided to cease voting in favor of the PS budgets, which caused new elections to be held.

Faced with the possibility of the return of a right-wing government, the lack of clear alternatives to the left, and the growth of the ultra-right in Portugal since 2019, António Costa's PS won an unthinkable absolute majority, the second after April 25, and the BE and PCP were roundly defeated at the polls. The responsibility for the PS's victory lies solely with those of the parliamentary left for not knowing how to defend those it claims to defend.

António Costa, leader of the Socialist Party,  
currently in power in Portugal.

## An absolute majority in crisis

The new PS government led by António Costa took office at the end of March 2022, but its government today presents more instability than stability. Why is this?

After the Troika's intervention, Portugal emerged from the previous crisis with its bourgeoisie more deeply dependent on European imperialism and, therefore without much room to maneuver in terms of the country's direction. An example of this was the turning over of the main sectors of the economy including energy companies (EDP, Galp, REN), aviation (TAP), and the banking sector to foreign companies. The culmination of this process was in the demise of the last great Portuguese bank, Banco Espírito Santo. Secondly, Portugal emerged from the Troika's intervention with millions in debt, and whose payment today costs more than half of the State's annual budget. Thirdly, the country has leveraged its growth in recent years on tourism (and secondly on services), a sector totally exposed to external fluctuations and which, therefore, offers no guarantee of stability or protection against the current international crisis.

It is in this context that we can understand how the current economic crisis has





The housing crisis and inflation are problems with dramatic consequences for Portuguese workers.

deepened the confrontations between sectors of the country's bourgeoisie. The dispute between the PS and PSD and the corruption cases that have come to light in both parties in the press is an expression of the conflict over who will appropriate European funds from the PRR (Recovery and Resilience Plan) also called the "bazooka" funds to guarantee their profits in a situation of crisis and a bourgeoisie which has no project of its own.

But above all, it is the current situation of social crisis which, by worsening living conditions for the working class, has led to growing social anger against the government.

## **Inflation and housing: two central problems**

The problem of inflation, which is currently affecting many countries, has brought dramatic consequence to Portugal because of the country's low wages. Rising prices are increasingly bringing food shortages and hunger to the poorest sectors of the population (about 2 million people live below the poverty line, but if we look at the number of people living on less than €660 euros per month, that figure rises to 2.6 million, or one fourth of the country's population).

With respect to the issue of inflation, Autoeuropa's situation at the end of 2022 is worth mentioning. Despite Volkswagen's million-dollar profits in Portugal, the company had limited its proposal for a bonus of 400 euros. The workers demanded a salary which the company fought against, and in order to achieve it they worked to bypass traditional management. They relied on an alternative management built during the previous revolt (in 2007), STASA, which organized a partial strike. This strike raised workers' spirits, who were able to finally force the company to make not only a second, but also a third proposal for a wage increase, proving that the militant struggle is crucial for workers to assert their will.

Housing has also been a key issue in the country. To get an idea of the exorbitant increase in housing costs, in January 2015 one square meter of a house or apartment in Portugal cost 1056 euros on average, today it costs 2467 euros (data from Idealista), which marks an increase of 134%. According to the National Institute for Statistics, about 25% of residents in Portugal over 15 years old have a mortgage loan, and the Euribor interest rate has risen sharply in recent months, thanks to the European Central Bank's anti-inflationary (!) measures, which has led to a significant



increase in monthly payments for most families. For those who live in rental properties, the situation has been incredibly difficult as well, as evictions for non-renewal of the contract due to abusive rent increases has increased. This means for some that suddenly they are homeless and have to rent a house in a city where the cheapest option is a studio apartment for 600 euros per month. If the minimum wage had risen by 134%, the same rate at which the price for a square meter of housing has risen, today it would be 1181 euros and not 760 euros per month, which is what it is now. The average wage has gone up only 3% (without taking inflation into account) since 2010, which marks a huge gap from the 134% increase in the price of housing. The problem is obvious, every month workers find it increasingly difficult to pay the exorbitant cost of housing, making it nearly impossible to live in the main cities of Portugal. Affordable housing and living with dignity is no longer a right for those who work in many Portuguese cities. Costa's leadership has been the great driver of these results, as his policies have fed real estate speculation, either by favoring tourism (and local housing), or by granting tax breaks to real estate investment funds, which, as good investors, prefer to bet on

the luxury housing market than on the construction of affordable houses for the majority of the population. It has also granted tax breaks to non-regular residents and digital nomads with higher incomes, allowing them to afford houses at prices impossible for national salaries.

In addition to working people's initial unwillingness to accept the bill for inflation, and their growing discontent with housing problems, there is the fact that corruption cases and the "legal" favoritism in companies such as TAP visibly show the government's double standards: for those at the bottom there are bills to pay and sacrifices, for the rich and managers there are privileges. This is what has caused workers' anger to explode.

## The teachers' strike and the need to unify the struggles and the general strike against the government

However, the main political event that has marked the situation since December has been the teachers' strike. The government's announcement that the hiring and management of teachers will be carried out by the local boards of directors, thus

Teachers' strike in Porto, February 2023.

Source : <https://www.noticiasaoiminuto.com/pais/2192622/milhares-de-professores-perguntam-no-porto-sera-precisa-uma-revolucao>







**The struggle for public schools and against the casualization of education and teachers has taken on a global dimension, which also includes non-teaching staff. ■**

replacing the current objective criterion based on professional preparation, and thus municipalizing education by bringing it under the purview of city councils, has provoked the teacher's ire since December 2022. This government proposal is just one of a host of measures implemented by the PS, PSD, and Troika governments that have made it difficult to hire teachers and made obstacles that limit tenured teachers from being promoted in their professional careers. In addition, teachers have not seen recognized all the service time frozen between 2011 and 2017, so they are missing out on the recognition of more than 6 years of work. Finally, the precarity that forces teachers to travel around the country and change their place of work every year, is aggravated by the huge impact of rising inflation and speculation in real estate.

Here too, teacher discontent has caused it to turn away from the traditional union leadership of FENPROF and towards the proposals of an alternative and combative union called STOP that emerged in 2018. Its proposal for an "indefinite strike" turned out to be organized by strike committees who decided on and organized the work stoppages democratically from the ground up at each school. Beginning in January 2023, the STOP also integrated the demands of the non-teaching staff, thus becoming a unified struggle for public schools.

These elements, along with the anger that had been building in public education, gave an extremely combative character to this struggle, forcing FENPROF and other union sectors to enter the struggle beginning in January when it called for district strikes and a national demonstration that involved over 150,000 people. FENPROF, despite calling for unity, has always refused to unite the struggle of all teachers, and has instead only pursued its own agenda. It is also preparing to blame STOP for a possible defeat, accusing it of weakening "responsible" unionism and giving arguments to the government against the strike.

The Minister of Education's response was to repress the right to strike, imposing the requirement that schools offer minimum services although education is a non-essential service of the economy. This made the strike less effective and led to other forms of struggle such as regional encampments and protests.

At the same time, the Minister was intransigent and refused to back down on any of his proposals, despite the massive support the teachers' struggle was receiving from not only the working class but broader society. Although the struggle was combative, there was a lack of a united front across union sectors, which would have made a unified general educational strike able to put serious pressure on the government.



## A political struggle is needed to challenge the model of democracy of the rich

At the same time, the government's inflexibility has turned the teachers' struggle into a political struggle against the government, which cannot be won in isolation.

But it is not enough to talk about the different problems facing workers separately. The working class and the poor need to strengthen and unify their struggles and develop a process of mobilization that will defeat the government of António Costa as a whole. That is why we believe it essential that the CGTP call for a big general strike across the country, in place of its usual plan for organizing separate struggles that dilute our strength.

But that would be only the first step, because in the democracy of the rich there is no alternative to the social crisis. Forty-nine years after the Carnation Revolution of April 25, 1974, it is necessary to question the model of the country in which we live.

Whether they implement more or less social measures, the PS and PSD-CDS prioritize benefitting the capitalist sector, and they share responsibility for building this country's economy on services and tourism based on low wages and environmental destruction.

The far-right party Chega wants to assert itself as an anti-establishment alternative able to address the problem of corruption, while also opportunistically claiming to be with teachers and other struggling sectors. However, its program includes the privatization of all public services, the attack on the right to strike, and the strengthening of the authoritarian power of the State, very much in line with its sympathy for Salazarism. It also proposes a society based on racial and ethnic discrimination (as in the case of the Gypsies), while protecting the big capitalists and guaranteeing Portugal's permanence in the EU. The Liberal Initiative also goes further in its submission to the EU, while proposing that the state support the private sector, a model that history has already shown benefits only a



April 25th 1974.



In Portugal, xenophobia hurts and kills.

Chega's program advocates racial and ethnic discrimination against the Roma while protecting big capitalists and ensuring Portugal's continued membership in the European Union.

Photo: Alberto Frias / Agência Lusa for the article by Fernando Antunes in [abrilabril.pt](http://abrilabril.pt).

privileged minority. None of this marks a way out for working people.

Today the PCP and the BE criticize the PS government, but their alternative is simply building a new generation of more of the same. They do not want new elections because they are afraid their electoral crisis will only deepen. An investment in their parliamentary privileges is holding them back, but above all the problem is that they lack an alternative project to the democracy of the rich. That is why they limit themselves to acting as advisors to the PS. While claiming the achievements of April 25 as their own, today they do not question either the democracy of the rich that has been installed into power forty-nine years later, nor the model of a country submissive to the EU. They want to heal the most serious wounds, but they refuse to start by curing the disease.

Accepting the democracy of the rich and abiding by the EU's rules means having our hands tied in the face of the great social and ecological problems affecting the country, the price of which is the misfortune and misery of the majority of the population.

That is why it is necessary to propose an exit from the European Union, to nationalize the banks and the strategic sectors of the economy, and to take the housing problem and the energy and environmental transition into the hands of

the State, among other social and environmental measures. Only a government that is not tied to the interests of the bosses and the EU can fulfill this program, so we need a workers' government capable of building a real democracy.

In order to carry out this program that truly confronts the social and ecological crisis that is capitalist barbarity, a new revolution is necessary. Only then will it be possible to guarantee the defense of the democratic rights of workers which are increasingly under threat today, such as the right to strike. But above all we must take up the unfinished task that began forty-nine years ago, in order to put an end to capitalism and build socialism, a society without exploitation and oppression, one that is socially and ecologically sustainable. Only then will we be able to speak of a true democracy for workers.

In order to achieve this we must take advantage of the lessons of the past and build a revolutionary organization that represents the workers and their most oppressed sectors, such as women and black people. En Lucha, as the Portuguese section of the International Workers' League, is today at the service of this national and international project.



# European and U.S. Plans in the Ukrainian War

Florence Oppen, Workers' Voice (USA)

## U.S. and NATO Prepare to Impose A Peace with Annexations

The arms shipment data show that Biden is not providing the necessary military aid to Ukraine to defend its sovereignty, nor to meet the urgent needs, in quantity and speed, of the Ukrainian working people facing the invasion and occupation of their country. Instead, Washington has viewed the effort as a means of getting rid of old equipment from stockpiles in order to improve U.S. military capabilities. Despite the delivery of Javelin anti-tank systems, HIMARS multiple rocket launchers and M777 howitzers, in addition to some US-made Patriot which have played a decisive role in the last battles, the actual deliveries have not met Ukraine's defense needs. The U.S. is working at a snail's pace to get its promised Abrams tanks to Ukraine and refuses to send up-to-date F-16 Fighters. George Barros of the Institute for the Study of War told *Newsweek* that "*there's a very flawed argument going around among some experts and some folks in the policy community,*" who argue that the US "[has] been sending Ukraine all of these weapons, and [the Ukrainians] still haven't made a major breakthrough since Kherson in November; therefore, military aid to Ukraine is a sunk cost." Yet Barros thinks, like the Ukraine defense minister, that the reality is quite the opposite: "*if you study Ukraine's operational needs and compare*



A Ukrainian soldier unloads weapons sent by Lithuania.

Photo: REUTERS/ Valentyn Ogirenko.

*it to what we're sending, there's a huge disparity there, the problem is that we haven't actually given the Ukrainians enough for them to demonstrate what they're really capable of".<sup>1</sup>*

The US military budget reached a record \$877 billion in 2022, accounting for 39% of global military spending. It is three times that of China which follows with 229 billion, a country which like Russia and the NATO powers is engaged in an unbridled arms race. And yet supposed military "aid" to Ukraine (\$19.9 billion), is only a very small part of Biden's military budget was for the and that most of that item was investment to renew the US military arsenal

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.newsweek.com/undersupplied-ukraine-prepares-spring-offensive-limited-western-arms-1789616>

and benefit the country's large arms multinationals. The US government is using the war in Ukraine to defend the interests of its large corporations abroad, expanding its zones of economic influence and strengthening NATO and the Pentagon's arsenal.

During the first year of war Biden has sought above all to damage and restrict the area of influence of Russia. The main objective of the aid constantly publicized but delivered in dribs and drabs was to exhaust and weaken the Russian military and economy, rather than to achieve a quick and decisive victory of the resistance against the Russian invasion. Today, with inflation running rampant and escalating economic competition with China, Biden and the US bourgeoisie there are signs that the U.S., are aiming for a policy shift: to seek to seal a "peace" that they can claim as a victory against Russia, in order to concentrate their political and military strategy in the Pacific and Southeast Asia.

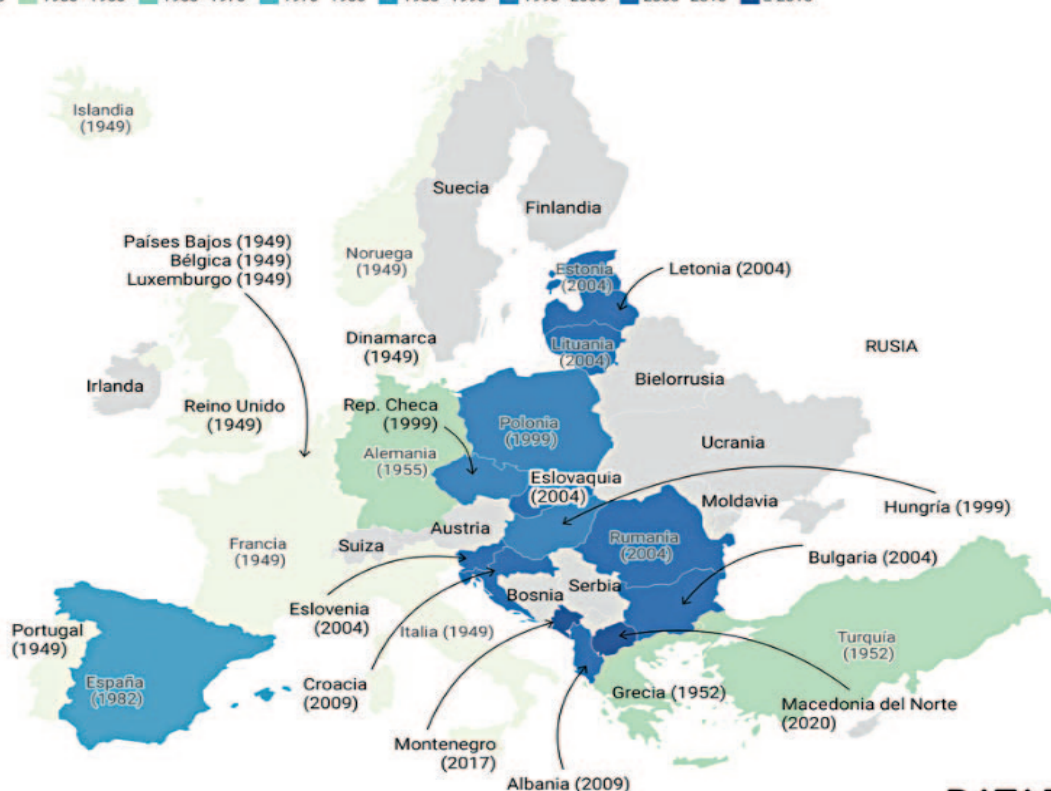
This change of strategy can also be explained by the presidential elections in 2024 for which Biden wants to present a positive balance of the war. This analysis is aligned with the views Richard Haas outlined in a recent article in *Foreign Affairs* magazine. Haas, the outgoing President of the Council on Foreign Relations, the most influential think tank for determining US government foreign policy, affirmed that the US "new strategy" in Ukraine should "first bolstering Ukraine's military capability and then, when the fighting season winds down late this year, ushering Moscow and Kyiv from the battlefield to the negotiating table".<sup>2</sup> In this two-timed plan to try to "win" the war for the remainder of 2023, the US should first "immediately expediting the flow of weapons to Ukraine and increasing their quantity and quality", in order to make this summer's Ukrainian offensive more

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/russia-richard-haas-west-battlefield-negotiations>

### PAÍSES EUROPEOS DE LA OTAN POR AÑO DE ENTRADA

Países de Europa incluido Turquía que forman parte de la Alianza Atlántica. Además están EEUU y Canadá, ambos desde 1949.

< 1950 1950-1960 1960-1970 1970-1980 1980-1990 1990-2000 2000-2010 ≥ 2010



Mapa: DATADISTA • Fuente: OTAN

DATADISTA





Biden and Zelenski during the surprise visit of the American president. Photo: White House, from the article by Sara Brull i Ortega, in [elnacional.cat](http://elnacional.cat)

successful and gain some leverage, and then to *“to roll out later this year a plan for brokering a cease-fire and a follow-on peace process aimed at permanently ending the conflict,”* also knowing that *“this diplomatic gambit may well fail”*. The argument made by Haas, and echoed by a growing number of political leaders in the U.S., is that *“as the war’s costs mount and the prospect of a military stalemate looms, it is worth pressing for a durable truce, one that could prevent renewed conflict and, even better, set the stage for a lasting peace”*.

This plan finally publicly acknowledges that the U.S. intervention in Ukraine is far from altruistic and is subordinated to the US’s own interests, but it avoids explaining all of its implications. First, because it does not avow that Biden’s interest in “peace” is also linked to an economic plan for Ukraine. It is worth explaining and denouncing the mechanisms being set up today by the US and European imperialisms to mortgage the future of Ukraine (the so-called “reconstruction”

plans and the indebtedness of the country to foreign creditors) since these put at the crossroads any possibility of real national economic sovereignty of the country in the future.

Second, and this is today the most serious, because despite the repeated assurances from Biden that he is committed to ensure the “sovereignty” of Ukraine, the U.S. could very well support a “peace” at the expense of the sacrifices of the Ukrainian people in the war, since any peace resulting from a mere military truce with a part of the occupied territory can in no way be a just and lasting peace for the Ukrainian people or for the peoples who are subjected to Putin’s annexationist ambitions. Biden, Macron, Scholtz and Xi-Jinping are going to start singing together the song of peace, Putin even recently affirmed that he is open to negotiate a peace. But we socialists, as Lenin said in 1915, affirm that the slogan of peace *“can be advanced either in connection with definite peace terms, or without any conditions at all, as a struggle, not for a definite kind of peace, but for peace in general.”* For the Bolshevik leader, the discourse of “peace” in general is *“entirely devoid of meaning and content.”* *“For peace in general everyone is undoubtedly for peace,”* both France and Germany were in World War I, and that is why both Putin and Biden claim it today, *“every one of them advances peace terms that are imperialist (i.e., predatory and oppressive, towards other peoples), and to the advantage of his “own” nation.”* The key to discuss peace from a perspective that puts the interests of the peoples and the working class at the center, is to focus concretely on “the conditions of peace”, that is the territorial, economic, social and political conditions that would guarantee a just peace. Lenin argued that “such terms must undoubtedly include the recognition of the right to self-determination for all

nations, and also renunciation of all “annexations”, i.e., infringements of that right.”<sup>3</sup> In the present war, which is a war of national liberation, the key condition for a just peace in Ukraine is first to guarantee the full sovereignty of Ukrainian territory and the withdrawal of all Russian troops. But that key premise is not contemplated in any of the vague peace talk being concocted by China, the US or the EU. That is why these talks must be rejected and we must continue military support to the resistance and building our international and independent workers' solidarity initiatives with Ukraine.

### In the Midst of War, the EU and the IMF Endanger the Future of the Ukrainian People

As a result of the war, Ukraine's GDP has fallen 30% but its foreign debt went from representing 50.7% of the country's GDP in 2021 to 90.7% in 2022. Today only 60% of the population was able to keep its employment, and only 35% has full time jobs.<sup>4</sup> Since the summer of 2022 both the EU through the European Central Bank (ECB) and the US through the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are plotting a plan for the "reconstruction" of Ukraine which is nothing but a recolonizing offensive to continue and deepen the neoliberal policies initiated in the years before the war.

This March 31, the IMF approved a new loan of \$15 billion for Ukraine with conditions already known for their devastating effects: “*more ambitious structural reforms to entrench macroeconomic stability*”, “*boosting productivity and competitiveness*” etc. These loans are in addition to the \$17.5 billion that



In the midst of war, Ukrainian workers face a labor reform that is detrimental to them.

Source: BWI (Building and Wood Workers' International) BWI (Building and Wood Workers' International), at <https://www.bwint.org/>

the IMF lent to the country in 2015 over a 4-year period out of reforms that Zelenski started implementing in 2019, mainly land privatization but also public assets. Since he took office, “*more than 700 state companies have been passed to the State Property Fund (SPF) for privatisation*”.<sup>5</sup> There are more than 3,500 companies are listed as state-owned, and 1,800 of them are either bankrupt or non-functional. Some industries like distilleries and grain elevators can be turned profitable easily and foreign investors are looking to buy them for almost nothing to make profit out of them.

Ukrainian agricultural land, 45 million hectares, representing 70% of the national area, represents a great source of wealth. As we explained in a previous article “before the war it contributed 12% of world wheat exports and 16% of corn exports” and in addition “*Ukraine also possesses a vast wealth of metallic and non-metallic minerals, including iron and other rarer elements but of growing use in new*

<sup>3</sup> LENIN, V. I. “El problema de la paz”, julio 1915.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/ukraine-workers-fight-anti-labour-policies-russia/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2023/03/31/pr23101-ukraine-imf-executive-board-approves-usd-billion-new-eff-part-of-overall-support-package>





MCC titanium mine in Ukraine. Source: article by Ángel Díaz in [elmundo.es](https://www.elmundo.es)

Ukraine has an enormous wealth of metallic and non-metallic minerals and 500,000 tons of lithium oxide in reserves. Shortly before the invasion, Zelenski had signed a strategic alliance with the EU, which has been suspended.

*industrial processes, such as titanium, gallium and germanium, with a certain weight of its exports in world markets."*<sup>6</sup>

Currently 68% of the country's land is in private hands while 32% remains in state hands. Initially, this privatization was carried out by way of handing over certificates of ownership of small plots of land to the workers of the former collective farms, but this process advanced towards the concentration of large private estates with the 2020 reform implemented by Zelenski and demanded by the IMF. As a result of this rapid privatization of arable land, a February 2023 report by the Oakland Institute explains that today "*the total amount of land controlled by oligarchs, corrupt individuals, and large agribusinesses is over nine million hectares — exceeding 28 percent of Ukraine's arable land.*" In fact, the new major owners of these lands are "*a mix of Ukrainian*

*oligarchs and foreign interests — mostly European and North American as well as the sovereign fund of Saudi Arabia. Prominent US pension funds, foundations, and university endowments are invested through NCH Capital, a US-based private equity fund.*" Most of them "*are substantially indebted to Western funds and institutions, notably the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the World Bank.*"

In May 2022, the EU announced that it had already disbursed €4.1 billion and would, in the remainder of 2022, give it a second loan for another €9 billion, and set up an international coordination platform, called RebuildUkraine, co-led by the Commission representing the European Union and the Ukrainian government, to manage the use of the loans and draw up a reconstruction plan defining "*the priority areas selected for financing and the specific projects.*"<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> ITURBE, Alejandro. "La estrategia imperialista de colonizar Ucrania", octubre 2022.

<sup>7</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_22\\_3121](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_3121)





Ursula Von der Leyden, current president of the European Commission. Photo from the article by Dr. Andrés Hildebrandt for Diálogo Político, July 4, 2019.

Ursula Von der Leyden, the current President of the European Commission made it clear that *"investments will go hand in hand with reforms that will support Ukraine in pursuing its European path."*

Read reforms that implement fiscal austerity policies against public deficit, privatizations and cuts in social rights.

During the war Zelensky used the state of emergency to implement a neoliberal labor counter-reform demanded by employers and international agencies.

The measure increases the work week to 60 hours, gives power to employers to transfer workers to war zones and easily dismiss them without cause, attacks the rights of union representation and allows delaying the payment of wages so that workers can continue to guarantee the profits of companies in Ukraine during the war.



Zelensky with the president of the European Commission. Photo: Periodismo Alternativo, 28 July 2022.

**During the war Zelensky used the state of emergency to implement a neoliberal labor counter-reform demanded by employers and international agencies. ■**

It also liquidated the Social Security Fund through Law 2620, leaving the future financing of various public services up in the air. Similar threats loom on the public healthcare system and social programs. We must warn our Ukrainian brothers and sisters of the strings attached to the current "loan" offered to Zelensky by the IMF and the EU and the danger posed to the social and labor rights of Ukrainians by the country's integration into the latter. The best example of this is Macron's pension reform, encouraged by the EU, which has been highly rejected by the workers despite the harsh repression of the government.

For all these reasons we must emphasize the importance of developing an independent working-class leadership both in resistance and in solidarity and reconstruction efforts.

Ukraine will need a workers' and socialist reconstruction to ensure its national independence, including the non-payment of foreign

debt, the reversal of neoliberal measures and privatization of land and public services as well as cuts in labor rights, and the renationalization of land, natural resources, and large enterprises under workers' control.

The Ukrainian working class has a whole future to

win, and that is why the working-class resistance to the invasion needs our active solidarity to win the war and emerge strengthened from the process.



# Join the IWL!

**Let's build together a socialist, revolutionary  
and internationalist party of the working class**



IS of the IWL

**F**ar from improving living conditions for humanity, capitalism generates more and more poverty and inequality. Today 828 million people suffer hunger in the world and it is estimated that probably 11 people die every minute due to hunger, but contradictorily enough food is produced for the entire world population and 30% more. The Covid-19 pandemic, which was provoked by environmental destruction, caused more than 6.6 million deaths worldwide as a result of capitalism's need to guarantee profits over life. Imperialist plunder and exploitation force millions of people to migrate, leaving their homes and families to expose themselves to the deadliest migration routes to the imperialist centers of Europe and the United States. The planet is facing an environmental catastrophe that threatens irreversible changes in ecosystems, leading to an accelerated increase in natural disasters, heat waves, fires, droughts and floods. The need to end capitalism is evident, but it is not going to end by itself, and that is why our project is more valid today than ever.

The heroic resistance of the Ukrainian people to the Russian invasion is at the same time a proof of the necessity of the world revolution, as well as of the possibility of it. The Ukrainian working class is playing a formidable role with its resistance and military combat to the invader. The defeat of Putin will be an impulse to the class

struggle in Eurasia. However, it is not enough to defeat the invasion, it is necessary to build a revolutionary party that will carry this struggle to the last consequences: to achieve that the Ukrainian working class takes power to defeat also the recolonizing project of Biden and the EU and Putin's annexationist ambitions in the region.

The current economic crisis and the imperialist order leads to an increase in the plunder and plunder of the peoples around the world. In response there are strong mass mobilizations against the various austerity plans on the one hand, as we see today in Europe, and on the other hand a rise of political polarization. We have witnessed the growth of far-right movements and political parties that have gained ground at the electoral and social level, as is the case of Trump in the U.S., Bolsonaro in Brazil, Kast in Chile or Meloni in Italy. The strengthening of the extreme right is linked to the disillusionment of the masses with the so-called "progressive" governments of the last period, all governments with and for the bourgeoisie, which have implemented the same austerity plans and attacks on the working class that previous governments had been implementing.

We are convinced that we can only resolve the crisis of political leadership firmly attached to the principles of Marxism and the conclusions it has drawn from the class struggle. For us the construction of our

parties is at the service of the construction of an international, democratically centralized party. Capitalism is an international economic and social system, therefore, the struggle for socialism cannot be built on national bases, it can only be victorious by destroying capitalism throughout the world. Our task is to win the working class to assume its leading role in the struggle for socialist revolution. This can only be done by educating the masses in class independence, understanding that the bourgeoisie is the enemy to be defeated, and that to do so we must destroy its state and defeat its governments.

As Engels said (paraphrasing the indigenous Dionisio Yupanqui) "a people that oppresses another people cannot be free", in the same way the working class in order to fulfill its leading role needs to fight against all forms of oppression, be it of women, indigenous people, LGBTs, blacks, immigrants, etc. That is why for the LIT-CI the struggle against all oppressions within the labor movement and its organizations (including the party itself) is of principle, and can only be done by raising a socialist program.

We do not build electoralist and parliamentary parties, but parties to organize struggles and take power to change the world. Although we participate in elections

and can even elect deputies, we do so in order to use those posts as a revolutionary tribune. We have no illusions in bourgeois democracy and for that reason we build organizations for action, parties of combat, that serve for the mobilization and organization of the masses and the confrontation with the bourgeois state. This requires discipline in joint and coordinated action, so that all the militants act as one and also the broadest democracy within the organization, where the base has access to discuss and define through its bodies the fundamental policy of the party as a whole.

We know that we are still far from the party that humanity needs for the triumph of the socialist revolution. However, we are convinced that there is no other way, there are no shortcuts or roads to cut. Only with daily militancy is it possible to build the party. That is why we invite all the activists who struggle day by day in the different areas of the social struggle to join our ranks, and to combine the struggle that we already do every day in our workplaces, in our neighborhoods, in the centers of study, with the struggle for the world socialist revolution, to create a world free of exploitation and oppression where we are "socially equal, humanly different and totally free".





