

2.4 Million Participate in May Day Demonstrations Across France

Workers and youth continue to mobilize in response to neo-liberal pension reforms.

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May 1 is International Worker's Day and around the world people were in the streets demanding a living wage and improved conditions of employment.

In France since January millions have taken part in rolling general strikes and mass demonstrations in response to the government's pension reforms, which will not only raise the age of retirement from 62 to 64, the new law imposes a 43-year work requirement in order to receive full benefits.

In Paris there were more than a half-million people who demonstrated against the declining status of working people. Police utilized teargas and other brute force in their attempts to curtail the militancy of the actions.

Reports indicate that nearly 300 people were arrested on May Day. In addition, 108 police officers were injured in the clashes, according to figures released by Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin.

The Interior Minister remarked that the high number of police injuries were rare. Darmanin said that one police officer was struck by a Molotov cocktail suffering severe burns although his life is not in danger.

Fires were set in the streets of Paris along with damage to private property. Thousands of police were deployed to cities around the country and there were additional claims of brutality and misconduct by law-enforcement personnel. Over the last four months, the French police have been cited by numerous human rights organizations for the mistreatment of protesters.

The May Day demonstrations reflected the widespread discontent with President Emmanuel

Macron who signed the pension reform bill into law absent a vote within the National Assembly. Recent polls reveal that Macron's disapproval rating was at 75%.

Many people in the Labor Day demonstrations demanded the president's resignation. Efforts by Macron to reset his administration's second term have been met with mass rejection. During one public speaking engagement by Macron, technicians refused to activate the public address system. Others bang pots and pans to make noise when Macron was in the area expressing their anger with the French government.

[In a report published by Al Jazeera](#), it described the atmosphere on May Day as follows:

"Video footage from various cities showed massive damage to property. In the capital and other major cities, police used drones for the first time to monitor the situation.... In Paris, radical protesters threw projectiles at police and broke windows of businesses such as banks and estate agents, with security forces responding with tear gas and water cannon, AFP correspondents said. Darmanin condemned protesters he described as being from the far left, known as 'black blocs,' saying they numbered around 2,000 in Paris and another 1,000 in Lyon. He urged that 'those who attacked the police and public property be severely punished'. Security forces deployed tear gas in Toulouse in southern France as tensions erupted during demonstrations, while four cars were set on fire in the southeastern city of Lyon. In the western city of Nantes, police also fired tear gas after protesters hurled projectiles, AFP correspondents said. The windows of a Uniqlo clothing store were smashed. Protesters briefly occupied the luxury InterContinental hotel in the southern city of Marseille, breaking flowerpots and damaging furniture."

All of the eight major trade unions in France united for the demonstrations on May Day. Since the beginning of the year there have been 13 days of action which has mobilized both seasoned workers along with students and youth.



French clashes on May Day 2023 (Source: Abayomi Azikiwe)

Other issues of concern to the French people such as privatization and climate change were also addressed on May Day. Environmentalists attacked the cultural center in Paris which is linked to one of the wealthiest people in the world. The center is sponsored by the Louis Vuitton Foundation that is owned by the 74-year-old multi-billionaire Frenchman, Bernard Arnault. Activists spray-painted slogans which included the words: “You’re watching direct action against the rich this May Day 2023.”

The rate of inflation has worsened the already decline in living standards among the French people as well as workers living in the western capitalist states. The United States-led proxy war in Ukraine has fueled inflation particularly in the energy, housing and agricultural sectors. Washington and its allies within NATO are sending billions to continue the war while imposing austerity on the workers and nationally oppressed living within the highly industrialized capitalist countries.

May Day Witnesses Upsurge Around the World

In other countries demonstrations were held in support of the working class. Britain has experienced numerous strikes over the last several months.

Nurses, Junior Doctors and Teachers among others in the civil service and the transport systems have been engaged in work stoppages for several months. The National Health Services (NHS) in Britain is suffering cuts while the Conservative Party government of Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has refused to negotiate adequate wage increases as the situation deteriorates.

The government is attempting to split the workers as a number of unions such as UNISON, which represents public service employees, have accepted a one-time payment of several

thousand pounds along with a pay raise of 5% for the next fiscal year. This offer was rejected by the Royal College of Nurses and UNITE trade unions.

In other parts of the globe, May Day was marked by mass demonstrations and unrest as well in response to the rising inflation. Demonstrations took place in Sri Lanka, South Korea, Taiwan, Germany, Italy, Indonesia, Japan, Spain and Turkey.

In the Republic of South Africa, President Cyril Ramaphosa addressed the united rally of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the African National Congress (ANC). Ramaphosa and the leaders of the SACP and COSATU expressed different views on the future of the tripartite alliance which was pivotal in the democratic breakthrough of 1994 that brought the ANC to power in the former apartheid state.

[President Ramaphosa told](#) the crowd that:

“Workers in our country and across the world have fought for the right to gather and celebrate. It has been really good that we have worked together as an alliance, under the leadership of the African National Congress.... Much as Workers’ Day is taking place today during a very difficult time for our country, we want to say that, yes, issues such as poverty, unemployment, inequality are challenges that can only be effectively addressed if we, as the alliance, continue working together, if we as the alliance continue holding hands to ensure that the ideals set out in the national democratic revolution are indeed achieved.”

In the U.S. May Day as a commemoration of working class struggles had been suppressed since the post World War II era when anti-communism became pervasive. The holiday which originated due to the campaigns to win the eight-hour working day in the U.S. was slandered by the ruling class as a socialist holiday.

Since 2006-2007, the celebration of May Day has resurfaced as a mass action resulting from the efforts of immigrant workers seeking equal treatment and legalization. However, the harassment and deportation of immigrant workers and their families has accelerated over the last fifteen years by successive administrations both Democratic and Republican.

On May 2, the administration of President Joe Biden announced the deployment of 1,500 U.S. troops to the border with Mexico. The White House claims this is in response to the expiration of a law which restricts immigration due to the COVID-19 pandemic which began three years ago. The administration says that the Pentagon troops will not be involved in police actions. However, this is clearly a military provocation against the Republic of Mexico along with other states in the Caribbean, Central and South America.

As the social conditions in the U.S. among the working people and oppressed worsen, the Biden White House will inevitably enhance capitalist-imperialist militarization both abroad and domestically. It will be the responsibility of those most negatively affected to organize and mobilize to defeat these attacks on the interests of the proletariat and oppressed domestically and around the world.

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