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## ***Mass strike in France to defend pensions – Time to fight for Social Security here***

Over 2 million workers in France participated in a general strike/mass mobilization on Jan. 19, denouncing plans by President Emmanuel Macron to make major changes to the pension system. There were over 200 separate marches, especially in France's small- and medium-sized cities. Another day of protest is scheduled for Jan. 31. All the major French political left-wing and social democratic parties have joined this coalition under the leadership of the labor unions.



**CGT banner at one of many demonstrations in France, Jan. 19, 2023.**

The French pension system is much like Social Security. It applies to all workers, both public and private; the system uses the number of quarters worked to determine the

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amount of credit added to a worker's account and has numerous exceptions, particularly for workers who have "arduous" jobs. A difficult or arduous job might involve heavy or dangerous work, outside or at night. For example, firefighters and railroad track workers are allowed to retire in their 50s.

Claiming a shortfall in the system, the reforms that Macron's government are proposing involve adding two years to the age required for a full pension, increasing the number of quarters needed and tightening up the definition of "arduous" work.

Le Parti Renaissance, Macron's party, formerly known as La République en marche, is using the shortcomings of France's pension system as an excuse to "reform" it. La Confédération Général du Travail, or CGT, points out in its agitation calling for the general strike Jan. 19 that a wealth tax of 1% or 2%, or a significant increase in the minimum wage would wipe out this shortfall, since the pension system is "pay as you go." The Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail (CFDT), the largest trade union in France; the Confédération générale du travail-Force Ouvrière (FO); the Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétiens (CFTC); the Confédération Française de l'Encadrement-Confédération Générale des Cadres (CFE-CGC); the Union nationale des syndicats autonomes (UNSA); Fédération Syndicale Unitaire (FSU), the largest teachers trade union; and Solidaires, together with the CGT had all attended a Sept. 10 press conference, which announced the Jan. 19 demonstration.

The head of the CFDT read a joint statement denouncing this reform "that will hit all workers hard"; he also indicated that this was the first step in a long campaign, since Jan. 19 "marks the start of an extended and powerful mobilization on pensions."

A nationwide strike over threats against pensions in 2019 brought the country to a halt for days.

### **Attacks on Social Security and Medicare in the U.S.**

The United States has a provision in its financial system called the "debt ceiling," which restricts the maximum amount the federal government is able to borrow to finance obligations that lawmakers and presidents have already approved. It does not authorize any new spending.

Reactionaries in Congress are now saying, since the U.S. government hit the debt ceiling some time in the middle of January, the only way for the government to recover and stay below the ceiling is to slash spending on Social Security and Medicare. The Democrats, who are in charge of the government, are refusing to negotiate.

Will the union movement in the U.S. remain mum and leave the defense of workers' retirement benefits to the Democratic party, or will they follow the example of the workers and unions in France and demonstrate their collective power?

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