

Six Million French Workers Strike Against Giscard Austerity Program

Oct. 7 (NSIPS) |— Representing the largest nation-wide job action since the mass strike in May 1968, 6 million French workers went on strike on Oct. 7, in what Communist union leader Georges Seguy characterized as “a massive, unequivocal and categorical no” to the cut-backs in living standards demanded in the government’s economic austerity program now being debated in the National Assembly. Two million workers took part in demonstrations staged throughout the country, with 500,000 marching in Paris alone, according to Prensa Latina.

This mass show of muscle gives added leverage to the Gaullist attempts to buck the genocidal austerity demanded by Wall Street’s debt collectors and an impetus to now widespread recognition among Gaullist-influenced banking and industrial forces that the the only alternative to a New World Economic Order and debt moratoria is economic collapse.

Seguy himself, who heads the largest French trade union CGT, emphasized in a speech to Paris demonstrators that “under present circumstances, trade-union action must take on a political character.” In addition to the large number of participants from traditional communist strongholds such as metal, dock and mine workers, large contingents of the white collar union (CGC) and the anti-communist Force Ouvriere (FO) joined the demonstration despite the contrary wishes of their national leadership. Farmers, shopkeepers and policemen also participated.

Two days before workers took to the streets, Prime Minister Raymond Barre, the unfortunate whose name has been pinned on the government’s austerity program (the so-called “Barre plan”) opened up the fall session of the National Assembly with a speech emphasizing essential Gaullist principles and his willingness to accept substantial “ameliorations” in the program. Barre, not a member of any political party, has demonstrated his compliance with the Gaullist “barons” who control the cabinet. On the other hand, the economic program, though given his name, is largely a 1976 version of President Giscard d’Estaing’s 1963 “stabilization plan” which led to the May working class upsurge five years later.

Barre stressed the themes of economic development and social progress, calling for a revision of the notion of “profit,” distinguishing between productive surplus profit which can be reinvested and speculative gains.

This last point was taken up in subsequent speeches and interventions by Gaullist baron Chaban-Delmas, two centrist deputies (considered generally as making up Giscard’s most reliable base of quasi-unconditional support) and the General Secretary of the French Communist Party, Georges Marchais, among others. The content of Barre’s speech (see excerpts below) leaves little doubt that he will gladly accept the introduction of the tax on speculative profits which all these voices called for as one among the substantial changes that are

expected to be made in the program. The French press noted recently that Barre had originally wanted to include this measure in the plan, but was prevented by Giscard.

Barre Offers Compromises On Key Economic Issues

Oct. 8 (NSIPS) |— The following are excerpts from a general policy speech delivered Oct. 5 by French Prime Minister Raymond Barre at the opening of the fall session of the National Assembly. In addition to speaking on economic policy, Barre offered French participation in genuine disarmament and non-proliferation talks. He further emphasized France’s independence on matters relating to nuclear defense as the reason for the country’s refusal to rejoin NATO’s joint Command. The speech was carried in *Le Journal Officiel*, the French “Congressional Record.”

The Government is ready to accept the ameliorations which will be proposed to its project, but does not intend to let it be disfigured.... The durable moderation of the evolution of prices is, in effect, the express condition for the return to a balanced and regular growth, full employment and social progress. It is indispensable for maintaining the position of our country in the world. In the face of a growing deficit of foreign exchanges which the pursuit of rapid inflation would ineluctably provoke, there would be only two possibilities: either refuse international competition by returning to protectionism, which in our country would provoke a regression of economic activity and living standards; or submit to a growing foreign indebtedness which would affect the independence to which each of us is profoundly attached.... The fight against inflation is not an end in itself, it is the condition for our country to become each day more of a society of liberty and progress.... France possesses an important development potential and our productive apparatus is capable of a dynamism and an efficiency which situates it advantageously on the world economic scene.... One could seek to resolve (the problems of unemployment) by adopting a Malthusian attitude which consists of distributing the work load between a greater number of taking parties. This attitude would in the long run lead to a limitation of revenues and a slowing down of growth. As for ourselves, we have a more dynamic attitude, according to which only economic progress ensures employment... We must revise, and I say this in all objectivity, a conception of profit which prevails too frequently in our country. It (profits) cannot be the product of rent from an already established situation, privileges or State subsidies, but the fruit of productivity and innovation efforts. Usefully reused, it is the condition for firms to develop their contribution to economic and social progress....