

Demonstrations greet new French president

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On the day of Gaullist Nicolas Sarkozy's inauguration as the new president of France, May 16, demonstrations by youth took place in a number of major cities. Although generally small in size, the protests' frustration and anger came in response to fears that Sarkozy intends to rapidly put in place his 'reform' of higher education.

In Paris, 1,500 students took to the streets, after a week of police harassment against protesters throughout France. One student demonstrating in the Place de la Nation told *Libération* that "there have been more than 1,000 arrests in a week, more than during the anti-CPE [First Job Contract] struggle last year."

Another was worried that he had not heard from a friend given a summary four-month sentence on the night of May 6 and jailed in Fleury-Mérogis prison. Students complained that the police repression was much harsher than in the anti-CPE demonstrations last year. This has hardened the protests too. "This time it's not the well-behaved demonstrators, on the one hand, and the *casseurs* [violent elements], on the other. When you get tear-gassed and baton-charged, anyone would pick something up and chuck it."

Protesters also mobilized in Rennes, Lyon, Nantes and Toulouse. The official student union UNEF did not back the day of action, as it has accepted Sarkozy's regime as entirely legitimate. UNEF president Bruno Julliard claimed in response to the wave of protests following the victory of Sarkozy on May 6, "We think that we must respect the result of the election. From a democratic point of view, nobody has the right to contest this vote ... it's counter-productive." Julliard is close to the Socialist Party and called upon students to vote for Ségolène Royal.

Sarkozy's attack on state education is one of his so-called "first decisions." Privatisation through the back door of universities by giving more 'autonomy' to local university governing boards and presidents will

favour partnerships with local employers and allow each university to set its own tuition fees, à la Blair in Britain.

Sarkozy has made it clear that there will be "minimum service" maintained in schools during strikes. This move to limit the right to strike by teachers, a section of workers who have been some of the most determined opponents of recent governments, is similar to the new law to be introduced on the "minimum service for public transport," directed against the traditionally militant rail workers. The state education service will "oblige all schools to open their doors to all children during strikes."

The general shortage of teachers when schools are operating, especially in deprived neighbourhoods, will not be addressed by Sarkozy. He bases himself on the Darcos report, which claims that there is a loss of working time among teachers due to so-called non-teaching activities. The study asserted that this activity is equivalent to 20,000 full-time teaching posts. Teachers will be obliged to work overtime to oversee school children doing their homework in school in the evening. A drive for greater productivity and an assault on democratic rights is now on the order of the day.

Sarkozy, having offered cabinet posts to several members of the Socialist Party, has also extended a nationalist-populist olive branch in the direction of the French Communist Party and its supporters. During his first day in office, the new president paid a visit to a memorial in the Bois de Boulogne in Paris where 35 Resistance fighters were executed by the Nazis in 1944.

Sarkozy declared that his first act in office would be to insist that a letter written by 17-year-old Guy Môquet, a communist, to his family on the eve of his execution in 1941 (one of 50 communists executed in reprisal for the killing of a German officer) be read to all school students at the beginning of each year. Môquet had been caught distributing anti-Nazi leaflets

in Paris. In his letter, the youth expressed no regrets and told his family, “what I want with all my heart is that my death serves some purpose.”

When Sarkozy first attempted to make use of Guy Môquet for his own purposes during the presidential election campaign, Marie-Georges Buffet, presidential candidate of the French Communist Party, expressed outrage, declaring that Môquet and those like him would today be in opposition to the Gaullist candidate’s racist attacks on undocumented immigrants and his other reactionary policies.

Buffet has now reversed herself and declared her support for Sarkozy’s decree that the young Resistance fighter’s last letter should be publicly recited. On May 16 she issued a press release which offered no criticism whatsoever of Sarkozy’s cynical ploy. Buffet simply reports his decision and comments that the reading of the letter is “a strong message.” The Stalinist national secretary calls Môquet “a bearer of patriotism by his participation in the Resistance” and also someone engaged in a struggle for “human emancipation that had a goal, that of constructing a Republic of rights and liberties in a democracy.” She declares, “It is important that this message be delivered to future generations and contributes in this way to placing at the heart of our Republic, values, rights and an ideal.” In their own way, the French Stalinists are signaling their willingness to do business with Sarkozy.

The overwhelming majority of the French bourgeoisie, represented today by Sarkozy, were noticeably absent in the struggle against Nazi occupation. Many supported Marshal Pétain’s collaborationist Vichy régime, which replaced the French revolutionary motto “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity,” with “Work, Family, Fatherland”—much more in tune with Sarkozy’s present crusade.



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