

Clichy-sous-Bois residents speak on French elections, social conditions

Alex Lantier in Paris
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WSWS reporters visited Clichy-sous-Bois in Paris' north-eastern suburbs to interview residents on the French presidential elections and social conditions in the Paris area.

Clichy-sous-Bois was the scene of riots against police in October-November 2005, after two youths died electrocuted in an electrical plant while fleeing police. Then-President Jacques Chirac responded by declaring a three-month state of emergency.

The WSWS spoke to Danaé, a high school student who lives in a nearby suburb. She explained, "It's difficult to live here, the buildings are badly built, the situation with housing is a total mess. The main problems are housing, finding work, and then making it to the end of the month. Once we've paid the electricity and water bills, we find we don't have much money left."

Danaé's father passed away, and her mother works as an assistant secretary. Danaé said that she and her mother live "in a house; our rent is 400 euros, there are six people total in the house." She said the situation was harder before, when eight people lived there.

Asked what she planned to do after graduating, she said: "I want to be a photographer, so I can help my mother by working."

She added, "There are a lot of conflicts, between everyone. The two young men who were electrocuted, I was talking about them yesterday with my mother. It's serious if things go that far."

Asked about the runoff election between Socialist Party (PS) candidate François Hollande and President Nicolas Sarkozy, she said: "They're the same, and most of the things they say they will do, they won't do. It's totally whatever." Commenting on Left Front candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon, she said: "Someone in my family voted for him, but I didn't pay attention to

it. But I wouldn't vote for Sarkozy or Hollande, that's idiotic."

WSWS reporters spoke to Antonio, a woodworker and locksmith who had recently lost his job after 29 years in the same company—where he began working at age 13 as part of a vocational program at school. He summarily dismissed the presidential elections: "Sarkozy or Hollande, it doesn't change anything, and even Jean-Luc Mélenchon he's just talk."

Antonio said he thought French politics is very corrupt, citing the French-led "high-speed rail project in Morocco. On a 1 billion euro [US\$1.32 billion] project, 500 million euros were embezzled." He noted the death in 1986 of the comedian Coluche, who in 1981 briefly ran for the presidency against the PS's François Mitterrand: "They got rid of him to keep him quiet."

He said he might go to Portugal, where he has family, because despite the economic crisis in Portugal, he hoped he would find work and better conditions there than in France. He pointed to nearby apartment complexes, saying: "It's like living in a matchbox."

Antonio added, "In the United States, or France, it's the same thing. People don't know how to change things; another president, one doesn't change anything that way." He thought the world should "get out of capitalism and the markets."

The WSWS also spoke to a group of youths at a private apartment complex run by the Chêne Pointu group, which also owns the complex where the first confrontations with police began in 2005. The youths who had finished their studies were working in construction or at odd jobs.

The youths complained bitterly of the police: "The police came some days ago and they searched us. At Clichy-sous-Bois, they send the worst policemen ... The

only people who come here from the outside are policemen.” One youth added, “They don’t need to touch people’s private parts.”

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They were uninterested in the candidates running in the elections, with one youth commenting: “We won’t have anything however it turns out.”

They said that rent for a two-bedroom apartment at the complex was €700, but that with charges for water, electricity, and other expenses the total cost was at least €900. They complained of extra charges applied by the landlords—often for repairs at inflated costs, or for appliances that do not work.

One youth explained, “They always jack up the costs; that is why there are riots. Without that and the police, there would be no riots. But we can’t pay these extra charges anymore.”

Another added, “We want bread, not violence ... But what’s happening is not normal. Why are there homeless people? I am not a terrorist or an outlaw, I don’t have a police record, I voted in the elections. But whether I voted or not, it does not make much difference.”

One of the youths invited the WSWS reporters into his home. His father said, “They’re all thieves, we work and we have nothing. The basic public transport card costs €38, after the rent is paid we barely have €400.” He showed WSWS reporters a stack of bills: “If you pay, they realize it and then they pile on more bills. The bills, it’s all shit. We pay stuff, it’s ridiculous.”

He showed WSWS reporters a €7 bill for a light bulb installed outside his apartment, adding that he would have gone out himself to buy the light bulb for less than half the price at a department store. There was a large monthly bill for a garage which was not yet open, and another for elevator repairs.

His son showed WSWS reporters the elevator, which was not working and its door was welded shut. The 10-story building only had a series of dimly lit stairwells, which create great difficulties for elderly visitors or residents.



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