

WSWS speaks to May Day demonstrators in France

Our reporters
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Supporters of the International Committee of the Fourth International and the *World Socialist Web Site* intervened in the Paris May Day march yesterday, distributing thousands of leaflets of “Political issues in the French presidential election.” The Paris march was largely under the control of union officials and PS supporters, with relatively little spontaneous participation by workers.

The event reflected both the impact of the propaganda by petty-bourgeois “left” forces in favor of Socialist Party (PS) candidate François Hollande, and popular distrust of Hollande, even among his voter base, due to his pro-business statements. Should Hollande be elected, he will turn against the working class and inevitably disappoint the expectations for social policies aroused among his voters by the petty-bourgeois “left” parties.

Merlin, a 31-year-old unemployed worker from Paris, commented: “A lot of people work for companies and are suffering to try to make ends meet. The people I know get by through helping each other out. I voted left, but not for the Socialist Party—Hollande is insipid and close to the money people, the ‘caviar left’. Between the left [i.e., the PS] and the right I see no difference—I will vote Hollande so that Sarkozy is ousted.”

Merlin said that Hollande “doesn’t represent the interests of workers,” though he thought that Hollande might “understand” conditions facing the youth. Nonetheless, he said that he would feel “relieved” if incumbent conservative President Nicolas Sarkozy were defeated.

Audiovisual worker Mathieu, 21, lives in Paris and is working with the *indignados*, last year’s “indignant” protesters in Spain. He said, “Hollande has not made many promises but he will respect them. He won’t

break up social security.”

Nonetheless, Mathieu recognized that Hollande “will do the work of international finance”. The solution to the crisis, he said, was “to reinvent politics like the *indignados*”.

Clement, a 21-year-old philosophy student from Normandy, said, “It’s better to have a PS president than the current one, Sarkozy. I don’t know if Hollande’s policies are practicable, I am skeptical.”

He also expressed concerns felt by broader layers of the population about Hollande’s signals of support for right-wing policies demanded by the banks: “If it turns out like Greece and Spain, I reject that.”

He criticized Left Front candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon: “Mélenchon is losing his credibility among people by calling for a vote for the PS candidate, Hollande, next Sunday.”

However, his friend Solveig interrupted to say that “the anti-Sarkozy vote takes precedence over everything.”

Clement believes the future is not bright for literature students: “Openings for us are becoming rare. We don’t know what will become of us.”

His student friend Nicolas said workers are “disappointed by the left and are voting for the fascist FN to make the left move—it’s a protest vote”.

Clement added, “There is a malaise in society. It’s dangerous to make historical comparisons, but from the angle of the 1930s, we can wonder about where society is going. French people no longer know who to vote for. The left, when it was in government, had a responsibility to the FN electorate. It didn’t know how to conserve workers’ votes. There’s a big gap between politics and the reality experienced by minimum wage workers.”

Didier, 55, a computer programmer in Paris works for

a top company, and his partner Sylvie works at the INSEE state statistics office. He said that Hollande has taken the PS away from social democracy towards the centre. In response to the question of why the “left” parties call for a vote for Hollande, Didier said: “There is an urgency to get rid of the current president.”

Despite his support for Hollande, Didier’s remarks underscored the political vacuum on the left, as the PS and its allies back the reactionary European Union. He explained the rise in support for the FN by the change in the tone of its leader, Marine Le Pen: “She monopolises the criticism of the European Union and finance which should have been the arguments of the left for a long time.” But “the FN in government would defend the big bourgeois.”

He added, “We have to unite to cut off the head of fascism. I am not naïve about social democracy, but our point of departure is the saving of our post-war social security system. The urgent thing is for Sarkozy to go.”

David, 29, a technical draftsman, was joined by his friends Jeremy and Guillaume, 29, who works in logistics.

David said: “I’ve always voted left. The wealth should not belong to the rich elite. I’m very affected by the crisis in terms of finding affordable housing. It’s impossible in Paris. We have to move out to the suburbs, where it’s a bit cheaper.”

He said that he voted for Hollande because he “was worried that 2002 would happen again when Le Pen (FN) beat the Jospin (PS) into second place.” Jeremy and Guillaume voted for Mélenchon in the first round. David thought that more austerity “won’t solve the problems. Growth is needed.”

Guillaume said, “I hope they go and find the money (to pay the debt) where it can be found”—which, he made clear, was among the rich. He continued, “We have to stop cutting government budgets as in Spain and Greece which impacts on the daily lives of people. We are supposed to swallow everything in the name of the crisis.”



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