

Youth and workers in Marseille speak out against austerity

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In Marseille, the WSWs spoke with youth and workers mobilised yesterday against the El Khomri law and more broadly against austerity, attacks on democratic rights and the drive to war.

Before the demonstration set off, the WSWs met Olivia, a high school student. She said she was demonstrating “for our future, against the labour law, the longer working times, making firing easier for bosses, I do not see myself living in a world like that. Already there is a crisis in France, it’s even more complicated when I no longer have the security that the law protects me.”

Olivia expressed concern for her future and that of her entourage: “Most of my family work, my friends are also future workers. Even people who are in public service are concerned. I feel that this absurd law in France leaves too much freedom to the boss. I am for the withdrawal of this law, but I do not know if we will be successful. We’ve been fighting it for some time already.”

Asked what she thought of the state of emergency, she replied: “I see people who have been taken into custody for 96 hours for ridiculous reasons. In my high school, another student was arrested for four days for insulting policemen, all because of the state of emergency. It’s crazy.”

Olivia also expressed her hostility to the war in Syria and the wider military escalation: “Governments are all rotten, they do not care about us. They are interested only in money, it’s pure PR when they say the war is to ‘protect the populations’. Behind those words, they enrich themselves, having good geopolitical relations wherever they want, we can only cry, they don’t care. ... It’s scary, we do not know in what world we will end up, we go to school to get a job later, but if you tell me that we can finish up in a country at war. ...”

On the Hollande government and its austerity policy, she said, “If he runs for president again it’s suicidal. For me this is a right-wing government. When we see the El Khomri law, it is for the bosses, not the people. This is a capitalist party that leaves people to die and enriches the bosses.”

Nouria, a high school student in economic and social science, expressed her broader discontent against the government: “We are demonstrating against the El Khomri law—this is crap, this law leads to nothing. We fear for our future. We are high school students—already before the law, we were told that life would be hard, but now we are desperate because if we make laws like that, we tell ourselves that in a few years it will be even worse, and if we do nothing and after, it will be too late. We are demonstrating against the whole government, the system—there is nothing that makes us believe that this will change anything the government has in store for us. We won’t get anything out of this. The government is trying to bamboozle us.”

She indicated her deep distrust of the war in Syria and terrorist attacks, stating that “The fight against terrorism is an excuse for the state of emergency.”

Nouria has seen the consequences of the state of emergency in police intimidation: “Arrests push me to demonstrate even more. I was there at all the demonstrations. I saw all the injustice. There were people who had done nothing that were battered with billy clubs. It shows us that they make no distinction. It’s their fault if it degenerated. It is true that there were some rioters, but we are pacifists. We were not looking for trouble.”

This feeling was shared by Vives and his daughter Caroline, who demonstrated against the El Khomri law but also against austerity and the state of emergency.

Vives told the WSWs: “This law is a step back from

all social progress since 1936. No one is immune; people on permanent contracts, they will be the first under attack. Today, if you want to do things, you have to have money, and if we don't have money, they've taken away our freedom. We want the withdrawal of the law—the state must not succeed, otherwise we'll lose what we have.”

His daughter Caroline added that “we are losing all of our social gains. The state is so unstable. We are demonstrating against the state of emergency. This is a police state! There is not much talk of police violence on TV; when I asked people whether they had heard about it, most did not know just how violent these exchanges are.”

Vives spoke of the state of emergency as a way for the police to attack demonstrators: “In the 70s and even in 1968, the police were all over, there were many things that the French people forgot, but there were assaults on people. It is again an attack on freedom of expression. Fortunately, there is the Internet, even if we have to sort through it, but we can filter the media and you get to see something else. My daughter showed me videos—I was surprised. When there are demonstrations, I'm mobilised and I'm there in the evening to see what people say, and it's true that even if it's not talked about I can find it.”

For Vives and Caroline, the Socialist Party (PS) is discredited. Caroline said that Hollande is “too free-market, he is a false socialist.”

A WSWs reporter asked what they thought of international military tensions. Caroline said: “There is media manipulation, the Cold War never stopped.”

During our interview, the demonstration took a different direction than originally scheduled and people threw eggs at the door of the Marseille section of the PS.



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