

Hundreds of thousands march against Macron's austerity measures in France

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Around 400,000 people protested yesterday against President Emmanuel Macron's plans to rip up France's Labor Code, which would open the way for mass layoffs, pay and benefit cuts, and speedups. Macron's labor "reforms" are the centerpiece of a massive campaign of austerity, including plans to slash state pension funds and unemployment benefits.

There were large protests in Paris (60,000 according to the unions), Marseille (60,000), Toulouse (16,000), Nantes (15,000), Bordeaux (12,000), Lyon (10,000), Rennes (10,000) Nice (5,000), and Le Havre, the home city of Prime Minister Edouard Philippe (3,400). It was the first protest organized by the trade union bureaucracy since Macron's election in May. Police used water cannons in Paris to attack protesters in the 13th district, while youth and police also clashed in Lyon and Nantes.

The ruling classes throughout the world, including in the United States and Germany, see Macron's "labor reforms" as the spearhead of a new round of international attacks on the working class. The *New York Times* hailed Macron's measures as upending "the notion of the worker in permanent need of protection against rapacious capitalists," bemoaning the fact that "Every effort at fundamental reform for at least a quarter of a century has foundered on giant and sometimes violent" popular demonstrations.

Macron's approval ratings are plunging, and the great majority of workers and youth oppose his plans to impose a social counter-revolution by extra-parliamentary decree. Macron won the presidency after defeating the neo-fascist Marine Le Pen in the second-round runoff of an election that saw mass abstention and an electoral debacle for France's traditional political parties.

The demonstrations took place against the

background of France's state of emergency which provide the presidency with "extraordinary powers," including subjection of people to house arrest without trial. These powers, which have been in effect since November 2015, have been used to persecute opponents of the labor law reforms under both Macron and his predecessor, Socialist Party President Francois Hollande.

WSWS correspondents attended protests in Paris, Marseille, and in the north of France. Protesters stressed their hostility not only to the destruction of the Labor Code, but also the drive to war and dictatorship. Many expressed their distrust of the trade unions and existing parties. After the elections, which provided a choice between a neo-fascist and a free-market ideologue, youth said they were disgusted with the political system.

In Paris, Nathanaël said: "This is the only way we have left to struggle: to show our discontent. The representative institutions of the Fifth Republic have failed, they have been failing for years. I am a high school student. I don't vote, and even if I voted, I don't see what it would get me. I don't see why I should. This is not how social protection works, this is not how the rule of law works. ... We are forced now to go into the streets and protest in order to make ourselves heard."

Asked about the *Parti de l'égalité socialiste's* call for an active boycott of the presidential elections to prepare the independent perspective mobilization of the working class against the president, he said: "I am pretty much in agreement with that. I am absolutely against the noxious, deadly ideas of the [neo-fascist] National Front [FN], but to vote is to support someone. Voting is supporting the system, the institutions."

Nathanaël pointed to the French general strike of May 1968: "It is the only thing to do, to mobilize the

working class. We are not in a trade union but a political struggle. ... We're close to a struggle like May '68."

He also denounced Macron's plan to write France's repressive state of emergency into common law: "That is the ultimate violation of the rule of law," he said. "I see it very clearly in my high school, every day they search our bags, demand our papers. Teaching people to submit from high school or junior high on, that's neither liberty nor the rule of law."

He raised the Korean crisis to stress the concern of the youth faced with the danger of war: "For me, the threat comes not so much from North Korea as from the relationship between North Korea and the United States. Trump is impulsive, egocentric and obsessive, in fact this person does not even deserve the terms we use to describe him."

Nathanaël also opposed law-and-order denunciations of protesters in the media: "I'm not a wrecker, I am not going to throw paving stones in storefront windows. ... There is an entire type of rhetoric and language of the far right that is taking over the media coverage."

The WSWs also spoke to Sarah, another student, who criticized growing social inequality and the turn to repression in France under Macron: "I find it intolerable to pass laws this way. I was not necessarily for Macron, especially on labor issues. In him, we're dealing with a person who knows nothing. What he wants to do with contracts, where you can have a five-year temp contract, that is extraordinary."

She added, "I am studying to work in Human Resources. I was a bit naïve. I thought that the work would be simple, there you have to help the workers. And now, time is going by, and I'm young but I am realizing that in the working world, relations are really vicious. And Macron is just piling on the viciousness."

On the state of emergency, she said: "I think its main purpose is to scare the people. It scares people, obviously when you are young, when you come to Bastille Square [where the demonstration started] ... We are basically under a type of dictatorship. It's not the type of dictatorships that we know from the history books, but I think very bad things are happening, the way the president uses his power."

Between the students and workers entering into struggle on the one hand, and the union bureaucracies and the pseudo left parties on the other, there is a class

gulf. The unions and pseudo-left political forces like Jean-Luc Mélenchon of Unsubmissive France (LFI) are trying to present themselves as militant alternatives to the collapse of the Socialist Party (PS), discredited by the wars and austerity policies of Hollande. In fact, however, they are deeply integrated into the political establishment and hostile to a revolutionary struggle of the proletariat, which the *Parti de l'égalité socialiste*, the French section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, aims to lead.



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