

Workers and youth mobilize in second protest against French labor reform

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Ten days after the first protest organized by the General Confederation of Labor (CGT) and Solidarity unions, attended by about around 400,000 people according to the unions, a second day of action yesterday gathered a similar number of protesters.

In Paris, Marseille, and Bordeaux, organizers cited a similar number of protesters as on September 12, when around 60,000 people marched in the first two cities, and 12,000 in the third. There was a substantial increase in Grenoble, where 2,000 people marched. CGT General Secretary Philippe Martinez declared, “Based on what we are hearing, it’s the same level in the street as last week, but there are more strikes in the factories.”

WSWS reporters spoke to marchers in Paris and Marseille. Protesters interviewed by the WSWS stressed their hostility not only to French President Emmanuel Macron’s decrees undermining the Labor Code, but also to the accelerating drive to dictatorship and war.

Protesters also expressed their skepticism towards the union bureaucracies’ strategy of dividing the movement by holding separate rolling strikes in different industries, and towards the policy of Unsubmissive France (LFI) leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon. They wanted to discuss how to fight Macron, which led to several discussions with WSWS reporters who are members of the *Parti de l’ égalité socialiste* (PES).

In Marseille, WSWS reporters met Sébastien, a teacher in a high school who was protesting “against the political continuity represented by Macron.” He hoped that people “would get together and debate. What I am dreaming of is that we would finally win a struggle. It has been decades that we have not won our struggles because the trade unions are not political

enough.”

Sébastien was skeptical of the union’s rolling strike strategy: “I don’t know what that will produce. We are fighting over texts, decrees that were there two years ago, ten years ago. We have to be struggling for broader principles.”

About Mélenchon’s upcoming protest on Saturday, Sébastien criticized the separation between protests organized by trade unions and political parties, which he wanted to unify: “I have no illusions about the separation of these events, it will produce nothing. This person [Mélenchon] is exactly what I can’t stand: an inflated ego.”

Sébastien criticized US war threats against North Korea and the broad rise of nationalist influences around the world, insisting that he “is for the class struggle, not a struggle between nationalities.”

The WSWS also met three sociology students, Arthur, Yann, and Alicia. Arthur said he “opposes the overall plan for systematic attacks waged by the government against social rights in France with these decrees.”

Alicia added, “We didn’t vote for Macron, but we are continuing on the issues raised by the elections. We have to be in the streets to show that we are not in agreement. A collective movement must develop that thinks about others and not just about ourselves. We are all under attack.”

About the call of the PES for an active boycott in the runoff of the presidential elections between Macron and neo-fascist candidate Marine Le Pen, aiming to give an independent political line for the working class, Alicia said, “The problem is that the different organizations here are dependent on the state. So they called for a Macron vote against Marine Le Pen. It bothers me that I cannot do what I want, that we do not have a range of

political personalities from which to choose. They tried to guilt-trip us [into voting for Macron].”

Asked about the different strikes that are being prepared, Arthur said, “It’s too bad that we are not able to bring the different struggles together. Everyone is under attack, the railway workers, the truck drivers. We could really blockade the economy, but it can’t be done this way. The trade unions are holding us hostage: the CGT, FO decide everything.”

Asked about the political alternative Mélenchon claimed to represent, Alicia and Arthur said they had no confidence in LFI: “The gimmick last week of kicking off the demonstration after he had said hello to the protesters, that is just media hype. Maybe then he wants to be a mayoral candidate in Marseille—why not?—these are power games. I don’t think that this really advances the struggle. Before his program was Humanity First, now it’s Unsubmissive France but you don’t know what is behind it.”

About Mélenchon, Arthur added: “He tries to make us believe that by voting for him, things will go better. If tomorrow he were elected president, I am not so sure that he would increase everyone’s wages. Big business would not let him do that. It is a swindle, what Mélenchon is proposing to us. He wants to get people out from the machine of the Socialist Party [PS, the former ruling party of ex-President François Hollande], he proposed to [PS presidential candidate Benoît] Hamon to become prime minister... What does all that mean, anyway?”

Alicia said she was looking for an alternative to capitalism: “They say that the capitalist system has existed for a long time, but there are other alternatives. It is hard to just say individually how it should be done, but it’s collectively through a change in mass consciousness that one can arrive at it. We are no longer in a social state: the elites, the “left” as well as the right, are no longer interested by people’s problems.”

Asked about France’s antidemocratic state of emergency, a legal measure set up after terror attacks in Paris in 2015, giving vast police powers to the state, Alicia said she was worried by seeing soldiers deployed everywhere throughout France.

Arthur added, “The measures that are used in the state of emergency are aimed at the people, not the terrorists. I have friends who are in anarchist groups

and who are banned from demonstrating based on the state of emergency. However, they are not terrorists. The law now being passed will create a permanent state of emergency [by writing its provisions into common law]. We are having problems reacting against attacks on the workers, on democratic rights. It’s worrying.”



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