

French students, workers march in April 19 protests against Macron

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The first protest of strikers from multiple professions since November 2017 took place on April 19, organized by the Stalinist-led General Confederation of Labor (CGT) and Pabloite-linked Solidarity unions, as student blockades of universities spread across France to protest President Emmanuel Macron's policies of austerity and militarism.

The CGT claimed 300,000 people (119,000 according to police) had marched in a total of 130 protests across France. Approximately 20,000 people joined the protest in Paris from Montparnasse to Italy Square. In Lyon, 15,000 people according to the CGT (9,200 according to police) marched. The CGT also claimed 13,000 protesters in Nantes and 65,000 in Marseille (6,000 and 5,000, respectively, according to police).

Apart from university and high school students, retirees, rail workers and workers from several industries that have taken strike action against Macron were present. Strike movements are emerging in Air France, Paris regional transport, the energy and electricity industry, the auto industry, hospitals as well as among undocumented workers and school and day care workers.

WSWS reporters joined the protests in Paris, which largely consisted of university and high school students. They were very determined to continue the struggle despite growing sentiment that the union bureaucracies are seeking to strangle the movement with a perspective of negotiating deals with Macron.

Gabriel of Clergy-Pontoise University said he was participating "above all to protest the free-market policies of the Macron government, which I believe is an extremist government both from the economic and police standpoint. I am here to protest the shock strategy orchestrated by Macron, the French political establishment, and the European and American

oligarchy. I think we have to mobilize in struggle not only against one or other reform or law, but against everything this man represents and the forces that support him."

Gabriel was aware of the limitations of the April 19 protest, saying he "thinks the mobilisation only of students is not enough. The working world, the workers, the self-employed, the entire population should be with us. We are no longer negotiating but trying to establish a relationship of forces, with strikes, blockades and occupations; this cannot stop. We have to go on, to harass them on every front. There is a political plan being advanced by the ruling class with a radical project in France and internationally. Macron's goal is to destroy the last bastions of social rights. He wants to devastate the people."

On the US-UK-French strikes on Syria, Gabriel said, "Our government is totally controlled by the pathetic and reactionary imperialist interests of our political establishment. Our diplomacy is behind American interests. If we do not get out of this system, we will not be able to change our foreign policy."

Louis, a student at the School for Advanced Studies in Social Sciences (EHESS) also spoke to the WSWS. He denounced the bombing in Syria, stressing that the movement against Macron should also be against war: "France continues to participate in interventions across the entire world to defend these economic interests. They should be fought, and that is what we are doing."

Louis also expressed his doubts regarding the trade unions and Jean-Luc Mélenchon of the Unsubmissive France (LFI) movement: "The unions are weaker and weaker; we have to develop other forms of opposition. In the longer term, the entire class should be united. Mélenchon is trying to do something new, I'm not sure whether it will work but it does offer something else."

The problem of LFI is that they have dangerous patriotic rhetoric, because they are not communists.”

George, a sales representative at Casino, said he feels “solidarity for workers who are fighting and for the cancelling of anti-social and regressive laws. The rail workers are not responsible for the railways’ debts; it is the fault of the governments. We are the ones they are attacking, but we work and pay our taxes. We are faced with a brutal government that is attacking students and ecological protesters, and we are bombing Syria. All in one week, that is a lot. There are other solutions besides bombing Syria.”

He added, “In Europe we have the resources to live better and better, but the opposite is taking place. Promises on Europe are being broken, that is done against the populations by governments that are far-right. We have to be more numerous beyond the trade unions; we have to have workers and also the unemployed that are present. It will be difficult, but we can do it.”

WSWS reporters also spoke in Marseille with students and workers including Lucien, an undergraduate history student. He confirmed that there is a growing movement at Saint Charles University in Marseille, with 300 to 400 people voting for the unlimited blockade of the university to demand the withdrawal of the Macron’s higher education “reform”, with the support of professors.

He explained that “the goal of Macron’s plans to make universities more selective, to introduce tuition fees and make it more elitist. It starts with his Parcoursup program to orient students after their high school degree. According to the high school a student is from, he has different options. If we are in a prestigious high school, there will be more interesting options than in a high school in a poor neighbourhood; the university will choose. With Parcoursup, there will be more of a hierarchy of choices; the government is freeing the system to focus on the best students.”

In response to the press denunciations and police repression against students blockading universities, Lucien said: “They cannot discredit us with democratic means, so as a last measure they resort to force. But we have the support of the workers who have promised to help the students if they try to throw us out of the university, like the far-right did at the Tolbiac campus” in Paris.

Lucien said: “Macron is determined, he is attacking the rail workers, he is launching attacks everywhere. I think he is trying to get as many things through as possible while people are still in shock. Turning on the rail workers is a political attack on one of the revolutionary-minded sections” of the working class.



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