

Macron's education cuts deny admission to thousands of French university students

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Less than two weeks before classes resume on September 3, tens of thousands of French students are still being denied admission to university by the Parcoursup algorithm set up by the Orientation and Success for Students (ORE) law imposed in the face of mass student protests this spring. According to figures released on August 9, of the 812,050 university-age students who are enrolled in Parcoursup, 66,400 still had not been admitted anywhere.

The fact that tens of thousands of students may be denied higher education underscores the reactionary character of President Emmanuel Macron's education cuts. The measure aims to make universities more competitive and to prepare their privatization. It gives France's public universities the power to select, and to reject, their own students.

Previously, virtually every student wanting to attend university, who had passed the *baccalauréat* exam at the end of high school, would be assigned to a public university in his or her chosen field. The new law, however, requires university admissions to take into account the *baccalauréat* score, the quality of the student's high school, and the student's academic record and internships. This favors more affluent layers of the population who can access better-ranked schools, travel, obtain internships and cultural experiences—opportunities denied to working-class families.

In the last three years, the number of incoming university students has grown by 30,000 to 40,000 each year, a tendency expected to continue until 2020. Public universities would therefore need substantial state investment to deal with the increased number of students. Instead, Macron's education cuts are substantially lowering the number of enrolments, forcing students to either attend private universities or

abandon their studies outright.

After the ORE reform was announced, students protested across France in the spring, blockading dozens of universities to oppose the law and demand its withdrawal. Macron reacted with brute repression, sending the police to break up the blockades.

The trade unions and pseudo-left parties like the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) and Unsubmissive France (LFI) played a key role in isolating the students. They kept students from waging a joint struggle together with the workers against Macron, by limiting the movement in the railways, airlines and other industries to symbolic actions subordinated to the trade unions' negotiations with Macron. The unions then approved Macron's policy of privatizing the railways and preparing more social attacks, isolating the student blockades and letting police crush them.

Faced with growing anger and concern among students, the government has tried to deny the figures about students being denied admission that are reported in the press. Higher Education Minister Frédérique Vidal told RTL radio: "There are 16,000 youth who are actively looking for admission, and 50,000 we are trying to contact and who currently are not answering our calls."

These 50,000 other candidates are "inactive," according to the jargon of the government, who claims that they therefore do not need to be counted as seeking admission. "We consider them inactive because one knows that youth can have other plans, be enrolled in the university system but not actively be seeking admission," Vidal tried to tell RTL.

The government's explanation flagrantly contradicts the experiences of thousands of students. *L'Express* contacted Guillaume Ouattara, an engineering student at Compiègne, "who has analyzed the Parcoursup

platform's algorithm, and concluded that the division between students who are or are not actively seeking admission is fraudulent."

Ouattara told *L'Express*, "To be considered as actively seeking admission, one must have recently formulated a request for internships or have contacted the rectorate (to discuss admissions plans). However, many students do not even know that they can contact their rectorate or have not found internships that suited them. However, they are still logging on to the system to check if their situation has changed."

Though these students are still waiting to be admitted, the education ministry blamed them for supposedly not trying to gain admission: "Every year, we have this problem. We ask the students to make themselves known to us if they are really looking for a place in higher education. We have sent them various messages on the platform."

Ouattara told *L'Express* he had his doubts: "Students I'm talking to have not all received either a phone call or a message. ... There are indeed 66,000 students who are waiting, not 16,000 as the ministry claims."

The government has assigned only €7 million in aid for unassigned high school graduates' moving expenses, assuming they will eventually be assigned a university. According to financial daily *Les Echos*, "Aid packages of €200-1,000 for moving expenses are being granted as lump sums at the beginning of the university term for graduates who are forced to move far from their home after receiving an offer of admissions."

This derisory sum of €200-1,000, which does not compensate the cost of moving and starting university studies, is more of an insult than an offer of aid.

If thousands of students risk not being able to attend or finance their studies, it is because of social austerity that allows the super-rich to accumulate exorbitant fortunes at the expense of the masses.

The €7 million aid package proposed to as yet non-admitted students is less than what some French billionaires make in a day. Thanks to Macron's anti-social reforms, the 13 richest people in France have increased their wealth by €23.67 billion since the beginning of 2018.

Bernard Arnault, the richest person in Europe and the fourth-richest person on the planet due to his ownership of luxury conglomerate LVMH, was able to increase

his fortune from €18 billion to €73.2 billion between 2008 and 2018—a decade of deep economic crisis and social hardship for masses of working people. It would take a minimum wage worker 4 million years to earn Arnault's net worth.

Arnault's fortune increased by €19.1 billion over the course of the last year—that is more than €52 million per day. Arnault "earns" in less than four hours the equivalent of the total funding proposed by the Macron administration to aid students who still have not received an admissions assignment from Parcoursup.



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