

High school students protest in Paris against French government's education reforms

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As “yellow vest” protests against social inequality and calling for the resignation of President Emmanuel Macron continue across France, hundreds of high schools remain shut down by demonstrations, with high school students protesting yesterday in central Paris. They denounced the government's education reforms and Macron's re-imposition of compulsory military service and expressed their solidarity with the “yellow vests.”

The *World Socialist Web Site* interviewed Gabriel Lacalmette, studying at the Olympe de Gouges high school. “We're in the 93rd district, from the working-class areas,” he said. “We came to protest the high school and university entrance reforms and the raising of tuition fees, which are increasing inequality and the discrimination that already takes place.”

Gabriel explained the impact of the government's reforms by citing the example of Macron's raising of tuition fees for foreign students in France. “Today we are at least fortunate to have an education system for everyone that is financially accessible. This raise will mean that actually only the rich foreign students can come to university. But we support education for everyone. The more educated people are in the country, the better.”

He also highlighted the inequality produced by Macron's school reforms. “With the new entrance requirements, if we apply to a Paris university, we have a smaller chance of admission than Parisians. The system of waiting lists disadvantages us compared to Parisian students. There was a baby boom in 2000, so there are now more people going to university. But instead of creating new places, they make more stringent selections. They create prestigious universities like the Sorbonne, and next to it the garbage schools for all students from the suburbs.”

Gabriel expressed his hostility to the reestablishment of military service: “Millions will be engulfed in this, but what we actually need is to create more places at university and to hire people. On one side they are slashing 2,600 positions, and on the other they're indoctrinating the youth and marching them into military service.”

He also opposed the idea that youth could be sent into a war in the Middle East. “France once again has a neo-colonialist position, and I don't want to fight for that. I'm for the sovereignty of every people and don't want anything to do with this fraud.”

“I support the yellow vests because it's a mass movement of workers that is involving people who have absolutely never mobilized before, who were not political. This is how we can struggle. I want a merging of the movement of students, railway workers, yellow vests, of the entire world to put an end to this world of inequality and injustice.”

The WSWWS also met two students from Mexico at the protest. They said that “everyone is against raising fees for foreign students.” They reported that some foreign students have been forced out of France and are now studying in Germany to avoid the fee hikes. Now, with the yellow vests, “it's time for a big part of the population to move against this intolerable inequality.”

They emphasized that the social rights established in France, like virtually free universities, “should be available to everyone” around the world.

The WSWWS also spoke to M. Blondel, a philosophy teacher at the Guy Maupassant High School. He said, “I came to support my students. They have been in struggle for a semester and have been blocking the schools by whatever means out of personal conviction.”

He challenged the legitimacy of Macron's reforms in the face of demonstrations and student blockades of

universities. “The high school reforms are worthless and are no way forward. Their aims are no good. We’ve seen the damage the selection examination changes caused last year. We are in the poor suburbs. The high schools lost the Priority Education Zone status. Our students can’t get into the Parisian universities. They’re confined to Nanterre.”

He added that there was “something fundamentally in common” between the “yellow vests” and high school students. “The youth, like adults, just want to live properly,” he said. “They’re not making farfetched demands. They don’t want to be the elite or millionaires. The yellow vests just want to be able to live properly from their own work. Our students would simply like to do their studies and find a job that will pay them fairly.”

He underlined the opposition of the youth to Macron’s reinstitution of military service. “The students are extremely worried. They worry about the time it will take from their studies, and they find it scandalous that this is the perspective the government has created for them.”

Asked about the danger that in the future the youth will be sent to fight and die in Syria or Mali, he replied: “Send our students there? Absolutely not. We have commercial and energy interests that create the disorders where we intervene, and in fact it creates no less disorder here. No one benefits except the multinationals who are involved, but for the people: nothing.”

He also stressed the importance of the growing support for internationalism in the wake of the “yellow vest” protests. “The international idea is growing. We notice there are so many people around the world who have the same interests and are starting to become aware of that. At the European level, one could imagine that the demand would not just be for the resignation of a president, but of higher governing bodies. The peoples’ sufferings are the same. Their interests are the same too.”



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