

Students occupy Sorbonne University as anger mounts at French elections

Samuel Tissot
13 April 2022

On Wednesday afternoon, hundreds of students occupied the eastern wing of the Sorbonne University in the center of Paris. Students began the occupation after the Sorbonne administration took the anti-democratic decision to shut down an anti-fascist meeting and tried to lock out the students.

The occupation is an initial expression of opposition to the dead end of the French presidential elections, which has become a contest between the “president of the rich” Emmanuel Macron and neo-fascist candidate Marine Le Pen. In May 1968, a general strike that brought the capitalist state to its knees was triggered by a violent police assault on students occupying the same historic university building. Now, meetings are being organized at several French universities for students to decide on what action to take in the coming days.

The occupation arose from an anti-fascist meeting that was scheduled to be held in the university’s courtyard at 1:00 p.m. on Wednesday. Students taking part in the occupation told the WSWS that as people gathered to attend the meeting, the administration announced the meeting was not allowed to go ahead. Security guards then blocked off all entrances to the university, denying entry to hundreds of students.

In response, those students who had managed to enter the Sorbonne building held a general assembly in a lecture hall. There it was decided by those present to initiate an occupation of the main building on campus. After the occupation began, large numbers of students outside the building continued to try to enter throughout the afternoon but were continuously blocked by security guards. By early evening, around 300 students remained in the eastern wing of the Sorbonne and began receiving supplies from supporters locked outside.

One speaker told the crowd: “We need to organize

ourselves into action networks by district throughout France.” Similar general assembly meetings have been called at universities across the country in coming days.

A large amount of graffiti criticizing Macron and Le Pen, as well as the police, was visible on the walls of the university alongside a number of anarchist symbols.

The initial meeting was called by Coordination Antifasciste Inter-Universitaire (CAIU), who have since tweeted the occupiers’ “non-negotiable demands” to the Sorbonne president which were decided at a subsequent general assembly on Wednesday evening. These demands were for the cancellation of classes until Monday, student control over entrances to the university, allowing students to sleep on site, and the right of the occupation to continue until the second round of the presidential elections.

The occupation and protests at the Sorbonne are part of a wave of actions taken by students and youth to oppose the “choice” between neo-fascist Le Pen and Macron, who has pursued fascistic policies throughout his presidency. At ENS Jourdan, also in Paris, and Science Po Nancy students have also occupied university buildings.

Students who have occupied the Logos building at ENS Jourdan since Monday published an article stating, “We refuse the possibility of ultra-liberalism and fascism in the second round.”

While so far, the police and gendarmerie have not intervened in the struggle, the development of the struggle will be closely watched by the state. Students who spoke to the WSWS pointed to individuals wearing plain clothes with earpieces in the area who did not seem to be associated with the university. This was in addition to dozens of security guards guarding the building’s entrances.

One occupier told the WSWS, “the occupation is to

fight against Macron and Le Pen; these are two very right-wing candidates, and most of France is very left-wing. This is not reflected in the elections, so we have to take action.”

Two students outside the protest said they had come to the Sorbonne to try to join the protest as they “rejected the choice between Le Pen and Macron” and that they were particularly concerned by both candidates’ Islamophobic policies.

While the occupation was triggered by the result of the first round of the presidential election, it reflects the anger that has been mounting among students and youth over several years. During the pandemic, students have faced lost income, have lost countless family members and loved ones, and have been infected en masse by a highly dangerous virus because of Macron’s herd immunity policy. Job insecurity and Macron’s intention to “Americanize” universities through the introduction of exorbitant tuition fees has also caused outrage.

The university’s heavy-handed response to the students’ democratic right to hold a meeting reflects the ruling elite’s enormous fear of opposition among workers and youth. The level of class tensions in France and across Europe is extraordinary. With large sections of the working class and youth angry or embittered at the choice between the widely hated Macron and France’s foremost neo-fascist, French society is a powder keg.

Most students and young people’s instinctive desire to fight against the “choice” forced on them by the ruling class is a strong confirmation of the call launched by the Parti de l’égalité socialiste (PES) for an active boycott of the second round of the French election. This is the third time in the last 20 years that a fascist has reached the second round.

Millions of young people and students voted for Unsubmissive France’s (LFI) Jean Luc Mélenchon on Sunday, hoping he would serve as a left-wing alternative to the continuous right-wing movement of the entire French bourgeoisie. His abrupt retirement on Sunday evening, before the final results had even been confirmed, shows that he is no ally of youth and workers in the class struggle. Despite having won the support of millions of workers and youth, Mélenchon ceded the battlefield to Macron and Le Pen.

Students currently engaged in or sympathetic to the

occupations must expand their struggle. Workers and youth throughout France and internationally are facing the same issues of war, the pandemic and worsening poverty because of rapid inflation. The critical issue is for youth to turn to broader sections of the working class and to fight to mobilize workers against the rotten choice on offer in the elections.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact