

“Between Le Pen and Macron, it’s plague and cholera.”

Workers and youth in northern Paris speak against candidates in French election

Our reporters
24 April 2022

On Saturday, the day before polling in the French presidential elections, WSWS journalists interviewed workers and young people in the working class north Parisian suburb of Saint-Denis about the vote between Emmanuel Macron and Marine Le Pen.

Farida, a mother, wanted to alert on the extent of police violence in the cities of France. She explained, “I live in the city of Franc-Moisin, and every night there are police officers who come on motorcycles and on foot. They throw tear gas canisters at parents with babies. I was shopping and saw the police coming in like savages, firing tear gas at us, and I had two small babies at the market. When I told the police that we need to be respected, they said, ‘We don’t give a shit.’”

She particularly highlighted the violence and disrespect for residents of the housing estates during police interventions.

She said, “The police come in like gorillas in the housing project, they’re aggressive. Whoever they catch, they beat up. They catch a 12-year-old kid, and there will be 60 of them. You think that’s normal? You’ve caught him, that’s good. Why are you dragging him by the hair and clothes? Afterwards, we parents get angry when we see the police dragging a 12-year-old, a 15-year-old kid that we know. Then they tell us, ‘Get back, get back or we shoot.’ I say, ‘Go ahead and shoot. We’re out there defending our kids!’”

Farida listened with interest to WSWS reporters on the Socialist Equality Party’s (Parti de l’égalité socialiste, PES) call for an active boycott of the elections to mobilize workers, reject both candidates and prepare workers for a fight against the next

president, whether it is Macron or Le Pen.

She responded, “Between Le Pen and Macron, it’s death and suicide, plague and cholera.” While she said she was leaning more towards a Macron vote, Farida expressed her hostility to Macron’s Interior Minister, Gérald Darmanin, “With Le Pen, it’s clear, open—[you] know what she wants. Darmanin is the same, or almost. We need to clear them out.”

She called for the international unity of workers in France. “Le Pen, we know she does not like us; she only likes the native French. But France, it is built by whom? With immigrants. The Portuguese, the Arabs, the blacks. Who works for a miserable salary? It’s the foreigners. So if she is going to get rid of them, how does she expect to get by? Are she and her family going to do the work of others?”

As WSWS reporters criticized both candidates’ alignment with NATO’s policy of waging war on Russia in Ukraine, Farida expressed her concern: “The Russian president can turn against us, for sure. And there would be many victims. France doesn’t have the means, and if it sticks its nose into something where it has no business, it’s better that it withdraws than cause harm.”

She continued on the role of the police in dealing with inner city workers. “I have adult children. I have two grown girls and two boys, one 22 and one 21. Yesterday, I sent my son to buy bread. When they came home, one of my sons who was outside was taken away by the police. I yelled at them, I told them I sent him to buy bread, and the officer told me, ‘Shut the ** up.’ I asked him, ‘Did I disrespect you?’ And he said, ‘No, I have every right to do it.’ But why does he have every right? It’s because he has a gun.”

“He said, ‘Why don’t you keep your children at home?’ I said, ‘He’s 22 years old, can’t he go buy a baguette?’ I think it’s absurd what they do, calling people names and saying, ‘Dirty Arab’, ‘Dirty black’, it’s not fair. Do we call them ‘Dirty French policeman?’ We don’t have the right to insult each other.”

Farida noted that she tells her children not to pick a fight or be provoked by police officers but that the outrageous behavior of the police creates a lot of anger. “My son he tells me, ‘Mom, when we walk down the street, they grab you to search your underwear.’ Stop grabbing people like that! The police can talk with their mouths but not grope people.”

She added, “The city police used to be unarmed. But now they think they are real police. They talk down to people, if anything, they call people scum. But the youth and children who walk in the street are not scum. They have a mother, a father, they have the right to speak as they want. You can’t insult them like that, call them ‘dirty Arabs.’”

WSWS journalists noted that workers are facing the challenge of uniting against a capitalist state that, since the 2015-2017 state of emergency, is moving more and more toward using in mainland France the methods it used during the Algerian War.

Farida replied, “I am African, I am Arab. Yes, I am originally from Algiers. I have lived here; my parents who have since died lived in Algeria. My father was from the year period of the war; he fought in the French war. If we live here, it is because we are French. My husband was born before 1955, he is French. But we respect all people, Africans, Arabs, Japanese, all kinds. That’s how France normally works, everyone respects each other. If we don’t respect each other, we will live like in the jungle.”

Guillaume, a 24-year-old product design student, told WSWS reporters he would not be able to vote because he was registered to vote in another district outside of Paris but that if he could, he would have voted “blank.”

“I don’t feel represented at all. The candidates who would possibly have been more left and represented me more I don’t trust them 100 percent. There is very little transparency. I wanted to vote ‘blank’ to say that this isn’t OK. I don’t want to vote for someone because I don’t want to find out what they are going to do

afterwards. They can spring anything they want after the election. I think maybe some people will vote for Le Pen, although she is so right-wing, because they are hoping she will just be different.”

WSWS reporters also spoke to August, a librarian in St Denis. He explained that he had voted for Mélenchon in the first round of the elections, like more than 34 percent of other young people in his age range of between 25 and 34 years old. “I voted for him even if I didn’t really believe in it. In the last election [in 2017], I abstained.”

August said he would vote for Macron though he was opposed to his policies “because I think there is a real danger that she [Le Pen] is going to get elected here. But even if he wins, it is not a step forward. Macron is [Interior Minister Gerald] Darmanin, and [he advocates] a very extreme-right policy. Even during the recent debates the Macronists have made a fair number of right-wing and racist statements. And while Le Pen talks about the Burqa, that ban was first put in place by [Socialist Party President] Hollande.”

August responded to the PES call for an active boycott to prepare for a struggle against the incoming government by an independent movement of workers: “I think it’s true what you say, that it’s the social movement that can really change things and that we can’t expect anything from the next government. Even if Mélenchon was elected, I would have many reasons to join protests against him.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact