

Workers, students denounce inequality at youth protest against French pension cuts

Samuel Tissot
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On Saturday, WSWs reporters spoke with youth and workers at the “march for our pensions” called by Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s Unsubmissive France (LFI) party in Paris. According to Mélenchon’s official Twitter account, 150,000 marched in Paris on Saturday, after 400,000 marched in the city in the nationwide one-day strike called by the unions on Thursday.

In a press release published Saturday evening, Mélenchon described the march as “an enlargement of the fighting front.” He then called for “trade union unity” and for more support for the second one-day strike and mobilization against the pension reform on January 31.

Saturday’s march was one of many events, including Thursday’s one-day strike, called by the union bureaucracy and the pseudo-left amid an explosion of anger against Macron’s widely hated pension reform bill, as well as the wider impact of rapid inflation and the NATO instigated war in Ukraine on the working class’s standard of living.

The parties that organized the rally, including LFI and the petty-bourgeois New Anticapitalist Party (NPA) and Workers Struggle (LO) organizations, have backed Macron’s dispatching of NATO weapons to Ukraine and his abandonment of any measures against COVID-19. They work to promote the political lie that “negotiations” between the union bureaucracy and Macron can beat back the bourgeoisie’s attacks on pensions and wages.

Members of the Parti de l’égalité socialiste (PES), the French section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), intervened in the protests, distributing leaflets and interviewing protesters for the *World Socialist Web Site*.

The WSWs spoke with Hardy, a student in Paris, who said: “We are mobilized against the pension

reform, it’s a collective feeling anyway. The reasons for demonstrations and strikes are always the same. It’s because there isn’t enough redistribution of wealth, it’s always in a capitalist framework. We don’t have the means to live, but others have the economic power that the bourgeoisie, the bosses and the state acquire through the exploitation of the majority of the population.”

Hardy added that the protests are also being driven by popular anger over the impact of inflation over real wages, “corporations raise prices insanely without justification, when it is not really a necessity. Smaller local businesses have to pass on the cost increases; they are pushed to do so by the big companies. Then there’s [the price of] petrol, but also for food, all the little things have become expensive, even bread.”

The WSWs asked Hardy his thoughts on the recent wealth report published by the charity Oxfam, which chartered the rapid growth of inequality during the pandemic. Oxfam noted in particular the grotesque wealth of Bernard Arnault, the richest man in France and the world, whose net worth is now equal to that of 20 million French people.

Hardy said, “He himself produces nothing, he simply exploits many more people. Twenty million people, that’s 20 million people who make a whole country work, 20 million proletarians who don’t necessarily have the means to live. It’s revolting.”

The WSWs also spoke to Dioum, who was part of a delegation of undocumented workers calling for the normalization of their right to work in France. He said: “We are mobilized for pensions. We are undocumented workers; we work here in France, and we pay in to the pension system, but we are robbed. We do not get our pensions paid to us. There are thousands and thousands of us who contribute to France, but we don’t have the

right to be regularized. We are confronted with two things, firstly the boss and above all the state.”

He added, “It’s very visible that Macron is more on the side of the bosses and not the population. You can see it every day. He wants to force us to work all the time, to create more and more precarious people.”

His collective of undocumented migrants has organized picket lines by parcel delivery workers for 13 months in two suburbs of Paris. He stated that the collective “demand[s] the regularization of workers. We are workers, we work mainly for the Post Office. If you’re dealing with packages, if you’re dealing with Chronopost, you are dealing with the post office. We have paid contributions for years, but we can’t get [hospital] treatment. We can’t declare sick leave. When we are injured at work, nobody helps us.”

He continued, “It’s modern slavery, what happens in some companies. There is work that no one wants to do, so undocumented migrants do it, for example in cleaning, in logistics, inside companies, and then in construction. We are not visible. There are thousands of us working, and they must give us our due, which is regularization. Our jobs are very difficult, very hard. And after age 50, we are tired.”

Dioum also spoke of the EU’s murderous “Fortress Europe” immigration policy, which has seen over 20,000 refugees drown in the Mediterranean since 2015, and nearly 1,500 drown last year, and the foundation of brutal camps across Europe, Turkey and North Africa. He said, “We talk about it. It’s not fair, it’s not normal to be put in concentration camps like in the Second World War.”

Dioum pointed to the difference in treatment between refugees from the Mediterranean and refugees fleeing Ukraine, “There are people who were massacred in Melilla, in Spain. Then people who come from Ukraine are welcomed with open arms.”

He added, “It’s capitalism that creates this, when we flee our countries. When we flee, it’s because for years there was slavery, there was colonization. Now the colonies are no more, but we still see that we are controlled by the Westerners.”

Asked about the link between NATO’s funding from the war in Ukraine with Macron’s recent decision to send tanks to Ukraine and the attack on pensions and wages in France, Dioum said: “They [the NATO powers] pushed Putin. Now they are in the war,

supplying weapons. We may end up in a Third World War. We must not forget that Putin has nuclear weapons. If he is pushed to the limit, he can use them. So, it’s not just an issue for France, it’s international.”

He added, “They’ve created all kinds of wars at home in Africa; we see what happened in Libya, there were thousands of displaced people. In Syria we saw the wars they created there. This is another war, but it is more dangerous, because it is within the borders of Europe. Before, it was outside Europe. But now it’s inside Europe, and if you push it, there could be a Third World War between nuclear powers. It’s all about the world.”

“All the money they use, for example for the tanks, in these wars, if it was invested in these countries, then people wouldn’t have to leave. I follow all these wars, whether it’s arming the Islamists (in Libya and Syria) or trying to support Ukraine or things like that. Tomorrow, we don’t know where it will go. One should always try to put out the fires, so what’s happening is not acceptable.”



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