

French students speak out against NATO-Russia war in Ukraine

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WSWS reporters recently interviewed students in Paris about the war in Ukraine and the fight against pension reform in France. The interviews revealed the enormous distrust and opposition that exists among broad layers of young people towards the imperialist war, which is ignored by the established pro-NATO, pro-war media and political parties.

Speaking about the war, Caroline said: “We are fed up. France is sending billions and billions to Ukraine, while there is not enough money for the French people. Just in the case of the youth, low-cost meals at the CROUS [student dining halls], which were 1 euro, were ended while they send billions to Ukraine.”

She pointed to the stark contrast between the billions of euros Macron is spending on NATO’s military escalation in Ukraine, and the billions he is taking away from workers. She stressed her opposition to raising the retirement age: “You work all year for five weeks off. I think that when you work all your life, at the end of it you still deserve to rest at the end and really enjoy it.”

She refuted the argument that NATO is waging a defensive war in Ukraine, recalling NATO’s pledges in the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act: “For me, it is NATO that is completely responsible because they want to get closer to Russia, and Russia had said no. They signed an agreement that they were not meant to spread NATO around Russia. They didn’t respect this contract, and that’s that.”

Indeed, six years after the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, NATO promised not to establish itself on Russia’s borders. But in the 1990s, 2000s and 2010s, as Washington and its European allies invaded Iraq, Somalia, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Libya and Syria, they also absorbed Eastern Europe into NATO. Now NATO claims it is defending itself against Russia, but it is French troops that are stationed along the

Russian border, not the other way around.

Konga, a Congolese student, also spoke on the war: “Sending of arms to Ukraine is really not a good thing, it is just stirring up conflicts. It makes the future very dangerous.”

He recalled Africa’s bloody experience with NATO’s neo-colonial wars: “Initially I was for the overthrow of Gaddafi (in the Libyan war in 2011). The media bombarded us telling us that it was a dictatorial regime that was oppressing the protesters. But a few years later, when I gave it some deeper thought, I realized that this was a bad thing. Since then, there has been a steady flow of arms and the whole area has been destabilized.”

Konga, who lived in Mali during its occupation by France to ostensibly fight Islamist terrorism, recalled, “I would say that on average eight out of 10 people seemed to be against the French presence in Mali. In their opinion, the French forces were supporting the jihadists and letting them carry out their attacks.”

Konga recalled that as a result of the embargo imposed on Mali with French support, “the price of food and basic goods went up a lot. It was difficult. People’s average income was about €80-100 a month, and with inflation it was really painful.”

In Ukraine, Konga stressed the enormous danger of a catastrophic military escalation between NATO and Russia: “Russia will not lose this war. As a nuclear power, losing this war would be fatal for it, so it will use all means. In this war, there will be no winners or losers, that’s why I prefer a diplomatic solution rather than sending weapons.”

He criticized the lack of debate and opposition to the war among the establishment and pseudo-left political parties in France: “I talk to French students; they know the risks but they are not fully aware of the seriousness

of the matter. ... I have the impression that the political parties are not really involved. If they called for a mobilization, it could have an impact. And that's not what's being done. The powers that be and the media say only what they want us to know. There is less and less debate and more and more propaganda."

Lorenzo, an Italian student, said that the war in Ukraine is "an awful situation. We don't know what the end of this conflict will be. I'm afraid, but I don't have the basics or knowledge about this subject."

Lorenzo stressed that he would not be happy about the idea of fighting in Russia: "Nobody would be, I think. War is not positive. There are economic, political interests behind it that do not respect human dignity. ... There was the pre-emptive war in Iraq, but there were no weapons of mass destruction [as Washington, London and Rome claimed to justify their invasion of Iraq in 2003]. I don't know if we youth talk about this enough. These are interests that we may not know about, but which impact us as citizens."

Septaria, whose father and brother are in the French army, told the WSWs about the social and economic hardships students in France face: "Even with the assistance of my family, I have problems eating at the end of the month. So, I can't imagine how students who must work can do so on top of their studies. I tried to work, but I couldn't do it."

She said: "My brother went to Africa some time ago now. I was very worried, especially as there had been reports in the press of accidents in which he might have been involved. We were very lucky, he wasn't, but it's a constant worry. And for my father, he's almost at the end of his career and I'm afraid that too much is being asked of him when he's already given so much."

She said she was happy to talk to WSWs journalists: "I find it reassuring to see that there are still people who are not so fatalistic as to say, 'Well, come on, let's go to war.'"

Walid, a Moroccan student, underlined the hypocrisy of the denunciations of Russian military actions in the French press: "There is always a double standard. It depends on imperialist interests. France always supplies arms to Saudi Arabia, knowing very well where they are going. Saudi Arabia will kill people in Yemen. This is the interest of this capitalist system at work."

Walid also expressed his sympathy for the WSWs perspective of mobilizing young people internationally,

to intervene in the current upsurge of workers' struggles and unify workers across Europe and the world to stop the war.

He said: "In Morocco, we always think that solidarity between peoples will always bear fruit. Of course, at the moment we don't have enough means to make it work, but in principle we have to show solidarity between everyone despite wars. ... There are denunciations, situations of repression or domination at the same time. But there is always this spirit of solidarity between people from different countries."

"In France at the moment, it's a battle of the people against pension reforms. It's solidarity between the working classes. But to make that happen, you need a lot of work, you really need alliances between all the people who have an interest in changing their country."



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