French students denounce complicity of union bureaucracies, National Assembly in Macron's cuts

Samuel Tissot
21 March 2023

On Monday morning, a general assembly of 1,000 students and staff voted to occupy Tolbiac university campus in Paris to protest Macron's anti-democratic passage of his widely hated pension reform.

Around 30 minutes after the occupation began, police and gendarmes, including riot units armed with assault rifles, descended on Tolbiac and blocked off the entrances, preventing students from other campuses who came to support Tolbiac students from entering. The cops ultimately cleared the occupation of the university on Tuesday. Last Friday, five students had been arrested at this campus while marching in defence of requisitioned garbage workers.

Mina, a philosophy and law student at Tolbiac, said, "Of course, the 49.3 [the anti-democratic article Macron used to pass the pension reform] made us all very angry. But, we were already protesting before, it's not the first occupation [of Tolbiac]. There have already been some at the beginning of the anti-reform movement. So it's not only against reform, but it's also against everything else, like the immigration law, global warming and the discriminatory selection of Masters' students in universities."

Asked why students oppose the reform, Mina said: "We're going to get to a job market that's already in a state of collapse, and we know very well that if we now accept retirement at 64, that means we're going to have it at 65-67, we don't know what's going to happen to us. Many students stand in solidarity with the workers, but it also concerns many of us now because there are students who already work."

"[The reform] is a policy of capitalist rigour and to pass it they must stamp authority over most of the population, to impose an economic and financial vision on them."

About police repression of protests, Mina said: "It is not a minority at all that is against the reform, and the only weapon they have left is the police. They're not very far-sighted, actually, it's really spreading the feeling of fear in people and it's extremely arbitrary." Referring to footage of police violence widely shared on social media, Mina added, "You could see 50-year-olds being beaten while they're on the ground."

Mina agreed with the perspective of mobilizing the working class in order to bring down Macron: "We saw that the demonstrations weren't enough. We could be 2 million, 3 million on the street, but Macron didn't care. So finally, it's blocking the country and therefore showing who is indispensable. It's the garbagemen, it's the people who work in the refineries, it's the students, it's us who really run the country. We have to show or prove our importance, and we have to use the only weapon we have left: the strike."

About the union bureaucracies Mina said, "The union bureaucracies are not at all representative of how the French think. Because we have seen that even if the all-union alliance calls for more scattered protests, there are spontaenous demonstrations and other unannounced things that happen. This shows we are not dependent on them to make demonstrations or to block the country. The all-union alliance is also protecting its own interests."

Speaking around an hour before the failed vote of no-confidence in Macron, Mina explained, "I know there are people who believe in the motion of censure, but the French shouldn't depend on the all-union alliance, nor on the deputies, nor on the government. You can't count on any of them, because the demonstrations are

© World Socialist Web Site

not enough to make them take us seriously. So now we have to move to a higher speed. We are seeing a radicalization of the movement, which I think is necessary since nothing else works."

The WSWS explained that the struggle against the reform was exposing the two fundamental camps in capitalist society, the working class and the ruling class. Against a revolutionary perspective of fighting for the working class to take power, the pseudo-left deputies in the parliament and the inter-union front are playing a reactionary role in defense of the capitalist state.

On the pseudo-left parties and the union bureaucracy, Mina commented: "Yes, it's exactly that. They're connected and each of them protects their own interests and not the interests of a large majority of the French people. This is why the only way we have left is to strike."

When asked about historical benchmarks for the current struggle, Mina stated, "The French Revolution of 1789 and May '68. Because May '68 inspires most students and it can be seen on the signs. In fact, it is said March 2023, the new May '68, because this is where the student movement really grew and managed to radicalize, which was not necessarily the case before. And the revolution, because it's a historical tradition and it is cherished in our memory and this movement needs to follow that path."

When asked why she thought how a revolution had been avoided with the Grenelle Accords in May '68 Mina said, "Well [the ruling class] were very scared and [the Accords] did win many freedoms, but the Fifth Republic then had many ways to stop the movement and they had the support of other governments in Europe. It wasn't just a French event, but the governments across across Europe united against it, which made it more complicated to fight in France."

Mina also spoke on the significance of the fact that the current struggle in France is unfolding amidst a massive wave of strikes throughout Europe and Africa: "I have seen that the English are in full revolt and in Greece as well. We hear about these events but unfortunately we are not in communication with them. In France, we are in a second stage of radicalization and now the third stage should be something more international.

"We have to understand this more by combining issues that affect us all internationally, such as at the ecological level for example. Especially as we know that the most precarious will be those who are impacted the most quickly. Everywhere we have a common enemy: the shareholders, the employers, and capital. We need a convergence of all these struggles for there to be real change."

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site