

Protesting French students denounce trade union “mediation” with Macron

Samuel Tissot and Alex Lantier
31 March 2023

On Thursday, WSWS reporters interviewed students at a demonstration outside the entrance to the Panthéon-Assas University on the Place du Panthéon in Paris. The protest opposed Macron and his pension reform, imposed without any vote in the face of the hostility of an overwhelming majority of French people, and also the inaction of university administrations in the face of far-right attacks on protesting left-wing students.

On Saturday, the “Waffen-Assas” group, whose name evokes Assas University and the genocidal Waffen-SS units of the Nazis during World War II, attacked students who were demonstrating in front of the Assas University, using knives and iron bars. One student had his jaw and nose broken. The previous Thursday, the same group attacked a joint demonstration of students from Assas University and the École Normale Supérieure.

So far, the university administration has taken no action to protect its students from attacks by neo-Nazi groups. At the University of Paris-Dauphine, the administration responded to students demanding protection from far-right violence by echoing the neo-Nazis’ demands that students end university occupations to prevent further attacks.

WSWS interviewed Blanche and Valerie, students at Paris-3 New Sorbonne University, about why they were participating in the demonstration.

Blanche explained: “It’s for several reasons, against the pension reform, the current political climate, the absence of democracy or the fact that the people are not heard at all. Also, in relation to us, to our studies, we are in Paris 3 and the high administration is very contemptuous. We don’t feel they listen to us at all. The university is closed even though there was a delegation that went to speak with the presidency to make our words heard, to make the distress among the

students heard. But they did not listen to us at all. On the contrary, the college was suddenly closed.”

Blanche added: “The youth is participating in this fight, we are here to support the workers and those who are more directly confronted with this, whether it is the generation of our parents or our grandparents.”

They then described their views on Macron’s use of provision 49-3 of the 1958 constitution of the Fifth Republic to force through his pension cut without a vote. Blanche said, “It’s totally anti-democratic. It’s pathetic, it shows that our government is in the business of imposing things. ... The Fifth Republic, built as it was in the political climate that existed during the Algerian War, gave a great deal of power to the president.”

Valerie added, “It’s an abuse of power, and we can really go on towards a regime that’s not democratic at all. ... It’s now that things are happening, it’s now that things will play out.”

Blanche also criticized the leaders of the CGT and CFDT unions for seeking “mediation” with Macron, while the French want to block the economy to bring down Macron. About the idea of a “mediation” with Macron, she said, “The problem is: how much are we actually listened to? ... Every time, in fact, it is a false dialogue, there is no communication. The government just wants to make announcements. So, this is another reason to revolt.”

As WSWS has explained, it is only possible to defeat the reform and bring down the Macron government by forming action committees in every workplace and school that consciously oppose the pro-capitalist union bureaucracies. Such organizations are needed to oppose the counterrevolutionary policies of the union bureaucracies and their political allies, such as Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who support “mediation” with Macron to try to stifle the movement.

Fabio, a high school student from Val-Du-Marne, also told WSWS why he came to join the protest.

He said: “Already today, in addition to being against the pension reform, it is to show that we are not going to let the police repression and the violence of the extreme right, which recently attacked protests and various blockades against the pension reform, stop us. This is to show that despite the government’s attempt to repress the movement and despite the attacks of the extreme right, we are still here, and we will continue. We will go until the withdrawal and of the reform. We are determined.”

He also mentioned the role played by the union bureaucracies in relation to Macron: “They want to negotiate with the government. We are against the government. We are against the government and its capitalist policy. So, we can’t let ourselves be taken advantage of by unions that are their allies. They don’t help us at all. We have to emancipate ourselves from the unions too. That’s what we’re doing through demonstrations and anyway, whether the unions like it or not, the general strike continues.”

Regarding the risk of violence from the far right and the government against the demonstrators who oppose the pension cuts, Fabio said: “The government is trying to silence us, it is trying to scare people. The arrests, they are multiplying. We see that the cops in demonstrations, they hit everything that moves. They don’t even fight violence anymore, they fight anyone who wants to make their voice heard.”

He concluded, “So yes, in fact, democracy is in danger, not only with the 49-3, but with police repression and with what is happening with the far right that is starting to attack us in protests. But we’re not going to let that happen.”

The neo-Nazi group “Waffen-Assas” that carried out the attacks is linked to the *Groupe Union Défense*, a far-right student group responsible for violence against student protesters in the 1960s and 1970s. The GUD, historically based at the Panthéon-Assas University, was reconstituted in 2022.

Now, amid an objectively revolutionary crisis in France, in order to terrorize students mobilized against Macron, the group seeks to revive the horrific traditions of French fascism in World War II.

About 10,000 French fascist volunteers joined the SS and joined in the Nazi war of extermination against the

Soviet Union on the Eastern Front. The Charlemagne unit of the Waffen SS, formed from the remnants of other French volunteer units in 1944, is hailed by neo-Nazis as one of the units that participated in the final defense of Hitler’s bunker during the Battle of Berlin.

WSWS asked Fabio what kind of rank-and-file organization is needed to defend against police and far-right violence. He said, “We need to have strong organizations. We need to have parties that know how to mobilize people, that know how to give rhetoric to people and that also make the movement massive. We need something that comes from the very base because they are aware that their situation, their working conditions and also their future is threatened.”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact