

French students denounce fraud of union “mediation” with Macron

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As union officials go tomorrow to meet with Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne for a hollow “mediation” on Macron’s pension cuts, anger continues to rise among workers and youth. Yesterday, WSWs journalists interviewed students at Paris universities. They stressed their opposition to Macron, who rules against the people, and their lack of confidence in union negotiations with him.

Like two-thirds of French people, these young people expressed their desire not to slow down, but to intensify political opposition and protests against the president of the rich.

The WSWs interviewed Juliette and Louis at Jussieu University. About Macron’s imposition of his cuts without a vote in parliament, using the reactionary article 49.3 of the French constitution, Juliette said: “It’s absolutely undemocratic. I think it’s important to take into account how he was elected, voters only voted for him because his opponent was a far right politician [Marine Le Pen]. He knew he wasn’t elected because there was support for his program.”

Louis added, “When a law is rejected by 90 percent of working people and 70 percent of the population, to pass it by force is already an admission of weakness and an assault on democracy.”

He also criticized Macron’s claim that there is not enough money to fund a decent level of pensions: “We are being asked to work two more years when in fact, the money, it is all there. We just have to get it. We should tax the big companies. There is a case on several banks in France that would not have paid 100 billion in taxes in France.”

Noting that since the beginning of the pandemic, France’s billionaires have increased their collective wealth by hundreds of billions of euros each year, Juliette said, “It’s absurd to extend the retirement time

for workers by two years while the richest 1 percent have totally staggering amounts of money. We could fix this problem by putting a tax on the wealthiest, that would be much fairer.”

She emphasized her opposition to union “mediation” with Macron, saying: “We do not need to be going to negotiate with them at the presidential palace now, Macron did not care what the union officials said as the movement began. It’s by doing massive strikes and massive demonstrations every day, I think, that the movement can have more impact.”

Louis added, “We understood right away that we would win would be in the streets and not in the institutions. Going on strike is the beginning. ... It’s been two months, more than two months since the movement started. And in fact, we’re having a hard time establishing continuing strike action ... the students, precisely, need to go and block the picket lines as well to allow industrial action to be launched everywhere.”

As a perspective for what could be accomplished, Louis also cited the example of the Paris Commune and the working class seizure of power, in 1871 in Paris. He said, “The Paris Commune, it’s interesting politically because it’s the establishment of a much more direct system of democracy, where it’s primarily neighborhood committees that decide and then pass information around.”

WSWS also interviewed Norah in front of Tolbiac University, who said she was very angry with France’s president: “Macron is governing against the people, he does nothing for his people except to make trouble for us.”

She added, “People are right to protest against the pension cuts. Sixty-four years is a lot, we have seen the retirement age go from 60 to 64. For an older person, it

can't be pleasant to work until that age, it's very tiring. ... If we were to vote, I think everyone would vote to return retirement to 60, at least."

"People are right to want to bring Macron down," concluded Norah, who said she didn't think trade union "mediation" would change Macron's plans. "He's stubborn, he's not going to give up on this. Yes, we've tried to talk once, twice, but we see it's not going to do anything. It doesn't help."

WSWS also interviewed Zacarias, who had mobilized since the first protests against the pension cuts: "We immediately wanted to go and demonstrate and show that we were against it, quite simply. But yes, we think it's undemocratic, clearly."

Zacarias stressed the importance of the international mobilization of the working class that is continuing across Europe, with a wave of powerful strikes in Germany, the United Kingdom, Portugal and beyond. The decisive issue, he explained, is a coordinated international mobilization of workers and youth.

In France, he said, "We are mobilizing for a very specific law, a very specific cut, but it's just part of a broader relationship between the capitalists who are trying to push the plundering of the people's labor even further. The issue is clearly international. All the antisocial laws they pass like this, they argue for them based on invoking competition, saying 'we have to stay in the race compared to other countries.' So the only conceivable way forward is an international movement."

Zacarias refuted the idea that class struggle is a French exception: "There is a culture of struggle in France, but it also can be done in Germany."

He added, "For example, in England, there have been attempts to protest, but they have been very much restricted by law. And because people still comply with these restrictions, the demonstrations have not been able to reach the scale they should have reached. ... If we want a real popular mobilization, we cannot comply with all the restrictions and measures, because the state machine clearly plans to prevent protests and demonstrations."



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