

Social anger erupts at “Block Everything” protests across France

WSWS reporting team
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Hundreds of thousands of people joined yesterday’s “Block Everything” protests against France’s budget crisis after the government fell on Monday. Police estimated 175,000 people attended 550 political rallies and 262 infrastructure blockades across France. Tens of thousands marched in several distinct protests in Paris. Police said 10,000 marched in Toulouse and in Rennes, 8,000 in Marseille and in Lyon, and 6,000 in Montpellier.

Clashes erupted as 80,000 police deployed by President Emmanuel Macron assaulted protesters, arresting 540, including 211 in Paris. Drones overflowed protests in cities, including Paris and Bordeaux, and across Brittany’s Morbihan and Orne regions. Police charged peaceful rallies and also arrested 30 students after assaulting a blockade of H       Boucher high school in Paris.

The protests were an eruption of anger at Macron’s call for social cuts to fund rearmament and France’s massive sovereign debt and his naming of Defense Minister S  bastien Lecornu as prime minister after Prime Minister Fran  ois Bayrou fell Monday. Four French governments have fallen in two years. But even as an overwhelming majority of French people oppose Macron’s social cuts and his calls to send troops to Ukraine, he again named a fifth unpopular, right-wing prime minister.

The protest revealed growing disillusionment and anger with organizations promoted by capitalist media as the “left,” like Jean-Luc M  lenchon’s populist Unsubmissive France (LFI) party and the Stalinist-led General Confederation of Labor (CGT) union bureaucracy. Their role in shutting down strikes in 2023 against Macron’s pension cuts, now opposed by 91 percent of French people, was widely noted. Workers need new organizations of struggle entirely outside the structures of official politics, based on an international, socialist revolutionary perspective.

WSWS reporters intervened at the “Block Everything” protest in Paris. Alexandre, a music student, said: “We have felt for a long time that no one listens to us. The nomination of yet another prime minister from Macron’s party was the

straw that broke the camel’s back. ... We live in a harsh political climate, we see really fundamental rights constantly put in question. It doesn’t matter who we vote for, decisions are taken elsewhere.”

He added, “Come on, we were a large majority against the pension cuts. We were not listened to at all on that. Then they start talking about attacking birthright citizenship as if that were normal. Then they try to steer us onto other subjects, to get us to focus on [Muslim clothes like] the abaya.”

Alexandre stressed his outrage at the media coverage of Gaza: “This is a genocide. I have made certain friends, one is from Gaza. It is so hard, his relatives are living things that are difficult to imagine. We then are told the problems of people in Israel, who overall still live relatively well, are on the same level as problems of people in Gaza, who are living horrible things.”

Luc and Boris, technicians at a repair center for Paris mass transit, stressed growing financial pressure on workers, and their disillusionment with LFI. Luc said, “We try each month to finish not too far into the red. It’s unbelievable. We are the country that pays the most taxes in the world. It would not bother me to pay taxes if public services actually worked well. But the CAC-40 [Paris Stock Exchange] are the buddies of the government.”

Boris said French life today is summed up by left-wing British author George Orwell’s phrase: “If your salary is only enough to eat and sleep, it’s not work; in the old days it was called slavery.” He stressed his disillusionment with the sell-out of the 2023 pensions struggle.

“M  lenchon,” Boris said, “is a dinosaur. He is there trying to get himself a position. And he got one, but he’s a turncoat, just like the trade unions. Once they have what they want, for them it’s over. As I see it, they’re all the same. They defend their little piece of the pie, and they’re willing to abandon everything to have just a little more.”

The WSWS spoke to a group of literature students, including Emma and Eva, who said: “In the June 2024 legislative elections, LFI got a lot of votes, but we are stuck

again with a right-wing prime minister who does not correspond at all to our expectations or political demands. We feel no one listens to us.” Emma added: “There are parties I support more, but there is not a single party I fundamentally agree with everything on.”

Explaining their homemade sign, they said: “The people in the government come from the social elites; very simply, France is not represented. Not enough power is given to the French people. The same people always decide for us. We want a government that represents what France is today.”

Bastien, a theater student, discussed the French budget crisis. “We are coming to the end with capitalism and free market policies as they have worked for many years. The proof is what is happening in the economy, besides all the craziness happening on top of that.”

Explaining why he wants a general strike, he said: “Workers are worth much more than billionaires, who do nothing, sitting on their chairs. Workers are the true essence of the people, they are the ones who really make the country run. And so, if we strike, the country is immobilized. And one-day [strikes] are not enough. We really need a strike that will let us immobilize the country and then really change things.”

The main obstacle, Bastien noted, is organization and perspective—pointing to Philippe Martinez, general secretary of the CGT bureaucracy, during its sell-out of the 2023 pensions fight.

“The problem is that the trade unions now are all sell-outs,” Bastien said. “Martinez, he is a big fat sell-out, with his big fat mustache.”

Samuel, a film student, said: “The working classes are no longer represented or listened to. The government does whatever it pleases. ... Bayrou called a confidence vote. It was manipulation, but okay, at least now he is gone. But the idea that he is replaced by Lecornu, a member of the party that backed all Macron’s governments since 2017—I’m sorry, this is just bull.

“Voting does no good. The people have to take power,” he said, pointing to Macron’s draconian repression. “They really have developed a sort of fascism. There are 80,000 police mobilized to repress us. Macron and the oligarchs make very clear: They are on the attack.”

Asked about the need for international organization of the class struggle by the rank and file, Samuel said he agreed: “Let’s suppose, by a miracle, we bring down Macron, great. But in England, Africa, North America, South America, in Asia, we will find all the same problems. The idea is not to think just in our little French corner, but to really think about the entire globe.”

He added, “We have no confidence in currently existing trade unions or political parties. We see this with the CGT,

who delayed mobilizing their members [to avoid joining the “Block Everything” protest]. The only way to fight is without politicians or union officials. We have to create our own groups, from below, the workers—garbage collectors, air traffic controllers, everyone who breaks their back doing work. If they stop working, the system cannot hold.”

Broader layers of workers in France and across Europe are entering into struggle, with a nationwide French strike on September 18. Left-wing youth must seek to intervene among workers and arm them politically for a continuing mobilization against austerity, imperialist war and capitalism. In its statement, “Which way forward for the working class after the fall of the French government?,” the *Parti de l’égalité socialiste* stated:

Two stark alternatives are presented. Either the capitalist oligarchy builds a fascistic dictatorship to crush the working class, or the working class wages a revolutionary struggle on a socialist program to expropriate the oligarchs. This requires breaking through the straitjacket of the union bureaucracies and building genuine rank-and-file organizations dedicated to prosecuting the class struggle.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) calls for the transfer of power from the trade union bureaucracies to the workers in all factories and workplaces. Such new forms of class organization, uniting workers in France and throughout Europe, are necessary to organize resistance to and defeat the corporate-financial oligarchy’s program of fascism, genocide and war.



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