

French students speak out against war, repression of high school protests

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For the past two weeks, high school students have been mobilizing en masse in France, against the backdrop of a European movement of young people and workers against austerity, militarization and war. The mass mobilizations in Spain against rents and evictions, the public-sector strike in Portugal and the struggle against the reintroduction of military service in Germany all form part of this upsurge of social and class struggles. All of them testify to a growing radicalization of young people disillusioned with the traditional bureaucracies that channel the struggles and political life.

WSWS journalists intervened among the students blockading Paris-VIII University in Saint-Denis, in the northern suburbs of Paris, to express their solidarity with the high school students in struggle. Their calls to stop the war, the military spending that drains education budgets, and the violent police repression of high school students shed light on the vast political tasks posed to the working class and to young people, who are beginning to seek a revolutionary path.

The WSWS spoke to Zack, a member of the student union at Paris VIII who was blockading one of the university's entrances. He stressed the students' solidarity with the high school students' struggle.

'There is a big high school student movement everywhere in France, and they are facing very heavy repression. And at the same time, they impress us, and their courage inspires us all,' Zack said. 'You have all seen the videos shot in high schools where there is water in the walls, ceilings collapsing, a lack of resources, classes of nearly 40 students. In fact, we are completely in solidarity with these demands. The professional unions are with them too, the CGT Éduc'action, which supports them and defends them on the blockades.'

He also linked the high school students' demands to those of the students, as Macron drains the universities to finance the armies and the war: 'In the universities, we also face measures that affect us, notably the 'Bienvenue en France' decree. It is a racist decree, which imposes an increase in tuition fees for foreign students to 3,000 euros for a bachelor's degree and 4,000 euros for a master's degree for students from outside the European Union. It is a racist attack of major proportions.'

When the WSWS journalists raised the link between this policy and the fact that the European powers are spending hundreds of billions of euros to remilitarize their economies and wage war against Russia in Ukraine, Zack replied: 'Everything I said before is precisely linked to this question you raise, the militarization of the youth and of society as a whole.'

Zack explained that the great powers are responding with war to an economic crisis of capitalism and to the rise of the class struggle: 'Why are all these people, all these states, militarizing? It is because they are in crisis, in fact. There is a global crisis in which the bourgeoisies increasingly need to compress wages, to exploit ever more people, and this is linked to the advance of the class struggle in the world, concretely. ... They must go and conquer new markets.'

Asked about the perspectives he saw and his opinion of Jean-Luc Mélenchon's presidential campaign and La France Insoumise, Zack replied that he placed more faith in a struggle like the general strikes of 1936 or 1968.

He said: 'Winning elections is fine, but in the end, it doesn't change much. Every time there have been major social advances, they were won through struggle. Through strikes, the blockades of universities and high schools, the link between workers, students, the whole

of society in fact, which forms a common front to struggle together, for better living conditions. That is what it was in '36, that is what it was in May '68.'

Asked by the WSWs about the role of the trade union leaderships, which sold out the struggle against the pension reform in 2023 and which are accompanying the militarization of industry, Zack replied: 'The confederal leaderships, yes, they are completely complicit with the government on this. They abandon the workers, the students, everyone, and all to negotiate crumbs.'

He stressed the fear of the trade union bureaucracies of being outflanked on their left by a movement of workers and young people: 'The union leaderships are increasingly jittery on the question of very spontaneous movements. We saw it with the yellow vests, where the unions did not support them at all, or arrived very late to the mobilization.'

On the perspective of building rank-and-file action committees, independent of the trade union bureaucracies, which could fight to prepare a general strike and wage a revolutionary struggle, Zack said: 'We are also in contact with committees organizing in working-class neighborhoods. They are popular committees of mutual aid and solidarity, there are several in the 93 [Seine-Saint-Denis].' He hoped that these organizations could 'push the line further to the left compared to the confederal leadership, which, as we know, is extremely soft.'

The WSWs also interviewed Maya, who was taking part in the blockade of the main entrance of Paris VIII, and who stressed her opposition to the war and to the austerity used to finance it.

She said: 'They give an enormous budget to the armies, to all the military equipment, etc. Whereas the budget for the universities — well, I'm sorry, but the future is the young people, it's not war. The future is not war, it is not killing people. Me, I am against war in general. For me, that money should not be invested in that way. The universities and the high schools, and the schools, middle schools, the hospitals need that money.'

Maya stressed her ambivalence toward Mélenchon and the presidential elections, torn between the idea of a useful vote for him in the presidential election and doubts about his will or capacity to implement the measures he advocates. She pointed to the debate taking place among young people entering the struggle

over the need for a more left-wing policy to stop the war and the police state.

She said: 'Mélenchon, we'll have to see, because there is also a question of what will be done and what will not be done, which is being discussed among us. We'll have to see what happens. Honestly, he is the left-wing candidate with the best chance of being elected.' Then, she added, Mélenchon 'will not necessarily solve all our problems. He is not the savior of the Earth, of France either, we must not forget that.'

Maya and Zack both supported the WSWs's calls to free Bogdan Syrotyuk, the young Ukrainian Trotskyist falsely sentenced to 15 years in prison by the Ukrainian regime for high treason, for having called for uniting Russian and Ukrainian workers against the war.

Maya said: 'It's nonsense. I personally send my support, obviously ... we send all our support to all the people who are imprisoned for absurd reasons of this kind, because it is totally unjustified. Under the pretext that we are in a climate of war, anyone can be imprisoned, at any time, for treason. Frankly, it's nonsense. Me, I want peace in the world.'

Zack said: 'Obviously, we give our support to the repressed comrades, whether in Ukraine, in Russia, and in all countries in fact. Because, in fact, why do they repress? Because they are afraid, they sense that the working class is organizing more and more against the war, against their austerity policies, and that scares them.'

This underscores the importance, for young people seeking a new political path, of the questions raised by the defense of Bogdan: the international unity of the working class, the mobilization of workers and young people independently of capitalist politicians and the discredited bureaucracies, and the necessity of a conscious political struggle to transform these struggles into a socialist revolution. This is the way forward in the face of the fascistic repression and the escalation of war being carried out by the imperialist governments across Europe.



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