

The mass protests in France are reverberating throughout Europe

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22 October 2026

One month ago, a movement of high school blockades and shutdowns began in France. It has not only deeply shaken the French government, but spread across Europe. An international movement is developing, as youth and workers raise the same demands in each European country and governments everywhere meet them with police violence and repression.

There is an echo in the present events of 1848, a year of revolutionary upheavals across the continent. This is, of course, an analogy, not a concrete comparison. The world of 2026 is vastly different from that of 1848. But the rapid spread of mass protests from France across Europe and beyond expresses the essentially global character of the movement now unfolding. More fundamentally, its emerging social and political essence is working class and socialist, not bourgeois-democratic.

The last month has brought to the surface sentiments that millions of people across Europe share but that official politics has long suppressed. There is deep opposition to the diversion of hundreds of billions of euros from education, pensions and social spending to the military and the war against Russia in Ukraine; to financial speculation that drives up housing and energy prices; to social cuts dictated by the financial markets; and to police repression and the promotion of neo-fascism. These are international questions, and struggles over them have won broad support across national borders.

On Wednesday in Greece, students, teachers and public sector workers marched in more than 50 towns and cities, including some 20,000 people in Athens. They protested low wages, the state of public education and unaffordable student housing, and pointed to the mass protests in France. A banner in Athens read “From Greece to France, give money to education,” and protesters’ tents in Athens, Thessaloniki and Patras carried the slogan “Greece and France, revolt everywhere—the same problems, the same enemy.” The union leadership has not called another nationwide strike until November 25.

In Italy, student groups have organized mass protests in solidarity with France. The Rete degli studenti network issued an appeal to French strikers, stating: “We are at your side. We will desert their wars. Money for schools, not weapons.” On October 16, students marched in cities across the country, chanting, “If things don’t change, we’ll do what they did in France.” Dockworkers’ unions in Italy, France, Greece, Turkey, Morocco and the Basque Country have called an international day of action against war and the militarization of the ports for October 30. The

CGIL union federation has announced a one-day nationwide strike for November 20.

The school protests in France rapidly led to solidarity protests by Belgian students against rising education costs in Liège and Brussels. They came amid a longer-running series of nationwide protests and strikes against the Belgian government’s policies of austerity and raising military spending, most recently a national demonstration in Brussels on October 9 and a public sector strike on October 12.

In Spain, where mass housing protests involving hundreds of thousands of people in more than 50 cities erupted in parallel with the French student movement, protesters have repeatedly declared their solidarity with the French protests. A refrain of protesters occupying city squares in Spain is “We have to learn from the French.” A one-day nationwide strike has been called for November 11.

In Germany, tens of thousands of youth are active in the “School Strike against Conscription” movement in over 130 cities, with slogans like “No to conscription, civil service and war” and “The rich want war, the youth want a future.” Students blocked the Französisches Gymnasium in Berlin, and police stated that they found leaflets calling to make “the spark jump from France to Germany.” After a school strike in Munich on October 20, further protests against conscription have been called in multiple German cities for late October.

Beyond these countries, strikes or youth protests are also under way in Portugal, Ireland and Albania.

The demands raised by youth and workers across Europe cannot be won on a national basis, through reforms granted from above by capitalist governments. The ruling class is neither willing nor able to make concessions. A financial oligarchy has amassed a concentration of wealth incompatible with democratic forms of rule.

France, Italy, Belgium and Greece carry state debts of more than 100 percent of GDP, and Spain’s is close to it. Pursued by their creditors and facing speculation against their debts, these governments could finance social concessions only by taxing the oligarchy, which they refuse to do.

Instead, they are pouring resources into war. Over the last month, the European powers recklessly escalated the war on Russia, despite Moscow’s warnings that further escalation could trigger nuclear war. They armed the Ukrainian regime for massive drone strikes on Moscow, Saint Petersburg and other Russian

cities, while NATO prepared a blockade of Kaliningrad.

They are planning up to €800 billion in additional military spending under the “ReArm Europe” plan, and Germany has exempted military spending from its constitutional debt brake to finance a vast rearmament program. They can raise sums on this scale only by gutting social spending.

This is why every government in Europe answers the movement in the same way. A ruling class that will neither touch its own wealth nor abandon its war aims can impose these policies only through dictatorial forms of rule. It responds to mass opposition with police-state measures and the promotion of neo-fascist forces.

This poses to the working class the task of fighting the root cause of these problems: the capitalist system itself.

The crisis in France shows that workers and youth cannot wage this fight within the framework of electoral politics and union negotiations with the capitalist state. While the union bureaucracy and “populist” politicians like Jean-Luc Mélenchon promote the illusion that the government will back down, President Emmanuel Macron is pursuing a ruthless strategy. His government has answered the protest movement with mass arrests and police violence that has left dozens of students maimed.

On October 17, masses of youth marched alongside “yellow vests” protesting the rising fuel and living costs produced by the US-NATO wars and energy blockades against Russia and Iran. The protest overwhelmed riot police in several cities, and Interior Minister Laurent Nuñez admitted a “loss of control.” Since then, officials have imposed curfews in several major cities, and arrests since the movement began have passed 10,000.

For the October 24 protest, the government is deploying the army. Soldiers of Operation Sentinelle will take over guard duties, freeing police and gendarmes to confront protesters alongside the GIGN, RAID and BRI assault units, armored vehicles, helicopters and water cannon. Nuñez says the forces must be more mobile, and he is considering banning undeclared demonstrations.

State officials are discussing a state of emergency, which would suspend basic democratic rights. The neo-fascist National Rally (RN), which leads the polls for next year’s presidential election, is calling for €140 billion in budget cuts by 2032, and its president, Jordan Bardella, has denounced the protesters as “professionals of chaos.” Bruno Retailleau, the presidential candidate of the right-wing Les Républicains, has raised the idea of banning LFI, whose candidate, Mélenchon, won nearly 8 million votes in 2022.

The CGT bureaucracy, meanwhile, has put off strike action until a one-day nationwide strike on November 5, leaving the youth and “yellow vests” isolated. CGT General Secretary Sophie Binet claims that Macron will back down if workers strike massively that day: “When workers stop working, the country comes to a halt, the economy is blocked, and our demands will be heard.”

Mélenchon, for his part, suggests that the protests could end once Macron accedes to the demands of the youth: “Our youth need a good ending to this sequence of events. Its demands must be heard.” He speculates that the government could take inspiration from the social concessions negotiated between the capitalist state and the Stalinist French Communist Party to justify the ending and selling out the May 1968 French general strike while preserving

capitalist rule.

But Macron is preparing dictatorship, not compromise. Binet and Mélenchon promote nationalist illusions and say nothing about the struggle against war, the expropriation of the capitalist oligarchy or the eruption of class struggle across Europe. They cut French workers and youth off from their class brothers and sisters elsewhere in Europe and offer no way to fight the ruling class’s plans.

The *Parti de l’égalité socialiste* (PES) in France and its sister parties of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) in Europe, call for the building of committees of action in the schools, universities, workplaces and neighborhoods.

Elected and controlled by the workers and youth in struggle, and independent of the union bureaucracies and the capitalist parties, these committees can fight for the broadest extension of strikes, free of the timetables that the bureaucracies set.

A central task of the committees of action is to unify the struggles now erupting across Europe. Against Macron’s police state, the strongest allies of French workers and youth are the workers and youth now in struggle across Europe. Their simultaneous eruption poses the need for a European general strike, which can be prepared only by breaking through the national framework of the union bureaucracies. The ICFI fights to link the committees internationally through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

Such committees can become the center of a movement to stop imperialist war, halt the rise of neo-fascism and resolve the debt crisis by expropriating the capitalist oligarchy. The youth’s demands for decent schools, affordable housing and an end to conscription and war cannot be met while that oligarchy controls the economy and the state. The PES and its sister parties therefore fight for the taking of power by the working class and the replacement of the European Union with the United Socialist States of Europe.



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