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France

High School students mobilise massively against attacks by Sarkozy Government

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French youth continue to show their potential for mobilising against education reforms. This time it is the turn of high school students, who, during the last weeks, have been on the streets against the suppression of teachers' jobs in high schools.

[https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/insurrectionlyceen2.jpg]

Everything started with the Sarkozy government's announcement of the elimination of 11,200 high school teacher jobs during the next year. In doing so, they have gone one step further in their policy of frontal attacks on education rights and of reducing public expenditure. Consequences will include the elimination of optional subjects (arts, Latin, foreign languages) and increases in student-teacher ratios and in teachers' working hours.

The first to mobilise were the teachers. On 18 March, responding to the call of the SNES, FO, Sud and CGT unions, thousands of teachers went on strike and demonstrated in Paris. There were around 2,000 on the demo, accompanied by 3,000 high school students who gave the first sign that a mass youth movement was rising again.

Since then, the dynamic of the teachers' struggle has been overtaken by that of the students, who have started organising themselves and taking the initiative. Methods of action reflect the experience acquired by French youth during the recent strikes: blocks and strike pickets, speeches during the lessons in order to interrupt them and to be able to mobilise for massive demonstrations in Paris.

In contrast to the other movements, this time it is the high school students in the most working-class areas that have taken the initiative and have formed the majority of the demonstrators. In this way, massive demonstrations and the capacity of organization of the French students' movement have begun to converge with the combativity and radicalization of the youth from the Paris suburbs.

From these beginnings, the movement has spread like wildfire. First in Paris, where hundreds of high schools have gone on strike spontaneously, overwhelming all political organizations and trade unions. But not only in high schools: the movement has reached dozens of middle schools (11 to 15 years), which have also blocked lessons and have massively mobilised for demonstrations. These demonstrations have brought together up to 50,000 people in Paris twice a week.

But the movement is not only in Paris. In Toulouse, Lyon and Grenoble, the mobilization has also achieved a historically unprecedented scope. On 18 April students in Paris started their holidays which are two weeks long. It is therefore the turn of high schools in the provinces, which are coming back from holidays now. And they have got started quickly. On 22 April, 15,000 students demonstrated in Tours, 2,500 in Toulon, 500 in Lille and 3,000 in Strasbourg.   These actions will give a push to the movement in Paris when the holidays finish there.

To achieve this level of activity, it is also essential that the movement organises itself and adopts democratic structures.   Coordination is beginning between the high schools that are in struggle, with the first national meeting taking place in April and the next one on 3 May.

6 May is the key date: the teachers' unions are thinking of calling a General Strike on education, and FO (Force Ouvriere – Workers' Force) is even thinking of the possibility of calling an inter-sectoral strike.

Update: Teachers' Unions FERC-CGT, SGEN-CFDT, UNSA-EDUCATION, SUD EDUCATION have called a strike

on 15 May. May promises to be a month of action.

 *An expanded form of this article first appeared in [Revista Corriente Alterna](). The translation of this extract is by [Socialist Resistance]().