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France

Open letter – French Students are Right to Rebel: Against an Order Based on Selection and Repression

- News from around the world -
Publication date: Monday 23 April 2018

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An open letter in support of the current student revolt, the railworkers' strike, and the struggles in defence of public services in France.

“Professional troublemakers.” Such was the term Emmanuel Macron used on the ORTF news programme at 1 o'clock on Thursday 12 April. He was insistent enough to repeat it at prime time on Sunday evening. Fifty years after May '68, or almost, the president is following right in De Gaulle's footsteps. Macron has identified his own “chienlit” [literally “masquerade,” but also a pun on “shit-in-bed” – a term used by De Gaulle to describe the protests]. Better still, he has sent in the CRS riot cops against the campuses that have mobilised, after having already deployed 2,500 gendarmes against the ZAD [“area to be defended”; occupied land and former airport site] in Notre-Dame-des-Landes. This is a full programme indeed for whoever wants to put the country back “En Marche” [“on the move”; the name of Macron's party]. Or rather, to bring it to heel.

The students stand strongly against the ORE Bill. It seeks to carve in stone a social selection process that is in fact already at work in today's universities; it will permanently shut their doors to high-school leavers from working-class and poor neighbourhoods and backgrounds. Are these thousands of young people meeting in general assemblies – notably at Tolbiac, Paris 3, Paris 8, Nanterre, Nantes, Lyon 2, Strasbourg, Marseille, Rennes 2, Grenoble, Rouen, Poitiers, Bordeaux, Toulouse, and Montpellier – really being manipulated by small cliques of “professional troublemakers”? Have these multiple university collectives, the staff from more than a hundred fields and departments, even including the presidents of several universities, and 8,000 people signing a petition, all of whom have condemned or already decided to boycott the Parcoursup [new university admissions system] and all that goes with it, been manipulated by so-called “professional agitators”?

Half a century after May '68, the same arguments, or almost the same ones, are being used all over again, to ring in the moment of beating up on youth, with physical beatings as well as words. The government responds to the youth with lies, infantilisation, the abject blackmail of the exams, and brutal repression. This is a simple philosophy and not a very new one. It tells you revise for your end-of-term exams, let other people think for you, give in to the world of mass unemployment, precarity and super-flexibility even while you are still in high school, and most importantly, walk in line, look at your feet and say thank you.

But this mobilisation is not only something created by students, teachers or (now also) high-schoolers. It is also the achievement of administrative, technical and library staff and precarious colleagues at all levels – all these invisible “foot soldiers” without whom the university would not work, but who are always the first target of budget cuts and management becoming just as brutal as the one working away in the private sector. And who cannot go on like this.

In many sectors the anger is directed at “junk work” and low wages – from healthcare to old-age carehomes, Air France or the secondary sector. The railworkers have engaged a decisive test of strength against Macron, who wants to make the counter-reform on the railways the founding act of his first term. But for the government the prospect of the youth and the world of labour joining together is something to be feared like the plague. That is why the authorities have decided to break the students and the strikers: at Nanterre as at Lille, Strasbourg, Bordeaux, Grenoble, Lyon, Nantes, the Sorbonne and Tolbiac. And when it is not uniformed police who are doling out the beatings, it is the far Right, as in Montpellier or Strasbourg.

For all these reasons, we fully solidarise with the current student revolt, the railworkers' strike and the struggles in defence of public services. The collective response must be of the same dimensions as the violence of these attacks. We have to unite our struggles to secure the withdrawal of the ORE Bill, Parcoursup, the “Pact for the Railways,” and

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the Asylum and Immigration Bill.

We demand an end to repression and the withdrawal of the police present on the campuses and the areas around them.

We demand the immediate release of the mobilised young people and workers who have been arrested since the beginning of the movement, and the dropping of all and any charges against them.

16 April 2018

See signatories [here](#)