France: A National Rebellion Against the Macron Government

written by Dan La Botz | October 19, 2026

A call for a general strike. This flypost refers to the student whose hand was blown off during clash with police.

I have over the last week or so been writing a series of reports on the French student protests, the last yesterday from Toulouse. I left Toulouse in the later afternoon on October 17 around 4 p.m. just at the protest was beginning, taking the train to Paris.

When I left, the protest was large and peaceful, as were others around the country. As we traveled, I saw news reports of the violent conflicts taking place in Paris and other cities. When we arrived in Paris about 9;00 p.m. we found the Metro subway system and many thoroughfares closed and ended up walking much of the way. We saw police cars racing through the streets and heard sirens, suggesting that skirmishes were still going on.

The next morning, on a long walk through the center we saw broken windows of banks and other businesses, burned motorcycles and cars, and trash strewn everywhere. Clashes continued on Sunday, October 28. And today, Monday October 29. Thousands have been arrested and a thousand injured.

Long Live Generation Z…

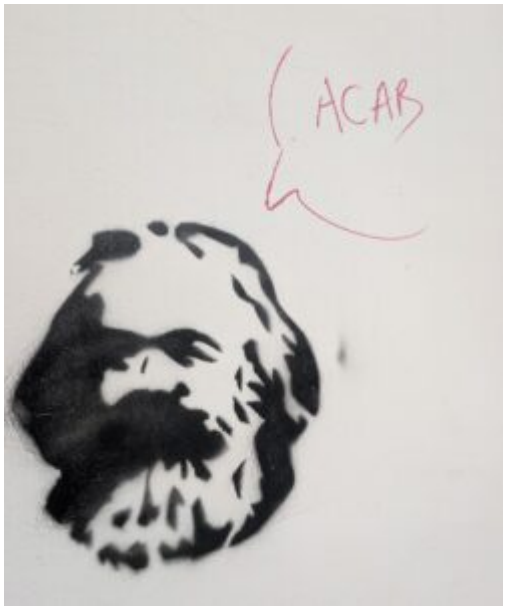
As I'm writing this, I can hear explosions—probably stun grenades or teargas being fired at protestors in the Place de la Republique, about 20-minute walk from the friend's apartment where I'm staying. The battle goes on.

What happened on Saturday that changed everything? Hundreds of thousands of people throughout France joined in massive marches to improve the education system, parades that sometimes came under attack by the police. And some protestors attacked buildings and vehicles, especially once night fell. My impression from reading the papers and watching video reports, is that some ultraleft demonstrators among the protestors wanted to cause trouble. And history tells us that the authorities sometime plant *agents provocateurs* in the crowd to provoke conflict.

What's clear, putting together the various reports, is that France is in a profound political crisis. The students, the suburban and rural workers of the "yellow vests," striking firefighters, and other groups have had it with President Emmanuel Macron's neoliberal regime that cut taxes on the rich and reduced social services for the working class and the poor. Poverty grew. Students reacted to the deterioration of their schools and of the education system, but many other French people shared their frustration with the government, with the rising cost of living, with the sense that the country has lost its way.

The French presidential election is scheduled for April 18, 2027 and the events of the last few days are likely to be defining. President Macron, while defending the right to protest, criticized the violence of the last few days. He suggested that he wants to address the students' demands, but he has given no specifics.

A friend of mine, a long-time leftist activist in Paris, said to me over lunch today, "The moment I heard about the violence, I said, well, if the election were today, Marine Le Pen will be president." Le Pen, the head of the rightwing Rassemblement national or National Rally Party (RN), is the daughter of Jean-Marie Le Pen, founded the fascist National Front, the predecessor of RN. Le Pen blames president Macron for the country's economic and social failure, but also blames Jean-Luc Melanchon for encouraging violent leftwing protests.



The French have adopted the English acronym for "All Cops Are Bastards." Did Karl Marx say that?

Melanchon is the head of La France Unsoumise, France Unbowed, the largest leftist party in Franc.

He has supported the student movement and criticized the Minister of the Interior, Laurent Nuñez, for his violent repression of the protests. He has not however called for violence.

At the moment, there seems no way forward for the social movements nor for the French government. Where is France going? Between 1934 and 1936, Leon Trotsky, the Russian revolutionary, wrote a series of essays published under title *Wither France.* He suggested France would have a socialist revolution or a fascist catastrophe. Well, a socialist revolution doesn't seem to be on the agenda today, but Le Pen's election could lead to a fascist disaster.

Note

My earlier articles on the students movement can be found here:

- https://newpol.org/french-high-school-students-taka-a-one-day-break-but-plan-to-continue-national-protests/
- https://newpol.org/french-students-renew-national-education-protests-students-make-demands-government-forced-to-negotiate/;
- https://newpol.org/student-demonstrations-across-france-face-police-violence/