

French High School Students Take a One-Day Break but Plan to Continue National Protests

written by Dan La Botz | October 7, 2026



A young woman held up her poster to protect her identity.

[Paris, October 7, 2026], French high school and college students that I spoke to today told me that they had taken a break in their two-week long national protest over educational issue, but still hundreds of them showed up at 6:00 p.m. at the Place de la Republique, a traditional gathering point for protestors. Misty and drizzly, it was a good day for a break, but some of the students I spoke to had brought posters or flags to the rallying and sang protest songs as they called to renew the strike tomorrow.

Éloise, a graduate student in contemporary history working on environmental issues, said, "As a graduate student, I'm also a teacher, and I'm here for my students. I think their issues are serious and their demands are just." Students I spoke with didn't want to use their last names nor be photographed, for fear of police retaliation. Éloise wore a kafiya, a symbol of solidarity with the Palestinian struggle. One of her friends carried a red flag with the words SUD, standing for Solidarity: United and Democratic, a militant French union.

The protests began on September 21, sparked by students blockading Saint-Exupéry High School in the Paris suburb of Créteil. High school students, who started the movement, have complained that there is a general deterioration of school buildings, that because there are not enough teachers, the classes are overcrowded. The protest spread in little more than a week to 40 cities, involving some 250,000 with high school and university students, according to the French Ministry of the Interiors.

Police responded to the protests by beating and gassing students, and while there had also been some student violence, the human rights groups say the violent police response was in appropriate excessive. Hundreds of students have been injured, and many police as well. Some 6,000 protestors have been arrested so far.

Jules, who is studying for a master's degree, told me that he too was concerned about the issues

raised by high school students, but also said that university students like himself faced problems as well. While high education is relatively inexpensive, at 178 euros per year (about US\$200), students must also pay rent, buy food, have other expenses. So he and a few of his graduate student friends had come to the rally together.

There were only two people over 30 at the rally, me and another man who appeared to be in his late fifties. His name was Stefan, a Rumanian immigrant who had long lived in France. He was making a video of the rally. I asked him if he was there in solidarity with the students, as I was. He said, "Yes, my son is involved and I'm concerned about his safety."

He said the police sent a lot of agents into the protests. He asked me if I was "un flic," that is a cop. I said, yes, and he laughed. "You're an American, aren't you?" Well, he had me there. We both raised our fists together, smiled at each other, happy to be there in solidarity with the young people.