

france: class struggle in autumn

2010,

september - november (2010)

These were published by me on the now hopelessly compromised Libcom Blog, between September and November 2010. They were clearly a bit over-optimistic, and undoubtedly some aspects of the struggles (particularly in the refineries) were grossly exaggerated by the unions in order to present themselves as radical, but the articles show some of the best aspects of the struggle, particularly those in the lycees.

I have included here some pertinent comments and updates which followed the articles.



Les Miserables **fight back**: fun and looting in Lyon, October 2010

Developing struggles in France

Sep 28 201

Very brief report on developments in France.

According to a recent report:

In Lyon, Paris, Marseille, Montpellier, Ales, Pau, Albi, Chambéry, in Les Hauts de Seine, la Creuse, le Cantal...In several refineries, dozens of classes (primary and secondary schools), in almost all the school and University canteens in Marseille, the one-day General Strike of 23rd September called by the Union bureaucrats is continuing, along with a few General Assemblies.

Much of these reports are probably slightly wishful-thinking exaggerations - for one thing, the continuation of these strikes has really been an excuse to have a very long week-end (nothing wrong with that, obviously). Often in France, when there's a one day holiday on a Thursday, no-one comes into work the Friday, but no-one considers it a strike. However, this time, it's included lots of schools, including the admin of schools, which, though not uncommon, seems to be a lot more widespread now. Barricades have gone up at a lycée in Ales, organised by pupils, parents and teachers (mainly against the cut-backs in teaching and increased class sizes). Since the first day of term, a primary school class near Montpellier has been occupied by parents, giving lessons themselves. In another school in Bagnol-sur-Cèze, since the 6th September (3rd day of school), a school has been on strike against the "incoherence" of the timetable. These 3 school movements' are just ones I've heard about personally, so it's likely that a lot more is going on elsewhere.

When I have some free time (of which I have very little over the next few days) I'll try to elaborate on these developments.

Update:

The strike, mentioned above, at Jean-Baptiste Dumas High School in Alès (Languedoc-Rousillon region in the South-West, near the Cevennes) started on Monday 27th, with the building of barricades 3 metres high around the doors of the school. The pupils then marched to other schools, including private ones, and several hundred kids' (15 and up) came out at different ones, amassing into at least 4000 demonstrating in the centre of the town in front of the prefecture and elsewhere. A cop on a motorcycle, surrounded by angry teenagers, accelerated quickly out, narrowly missing many of the demonstrators. At one private school, about 4 kilometers outside of Ales, over 200 kids came out on strike before the headmaster locked the others inside. The CRS were called and threatened the demonstrators outside with

tear gas, who were trying to break down the doors, forcing them to disperse. Monday to Tuesday night, some of the students slept in tents in front of the schools (though a hot autumn during the day, it's pretty cold at night).

These demonstrations continued into Tuesday, including another one in front of the prefecture where stones were thrown and a school student arrested. At 7.45 p.m. four truckloads of gendarmes and 8 truckloads of CRS cops came along to the Jean-Baptiste Dumas school and dismantled the barricades, whilst just 6 teenagers "occupied" the roundabout in their tents in front of the High School, forcing fairly long drawn-out negotiations between Alès's sous-préfet' (vice-president of the prefecture) in person, along with the commander of the cops, a leading councillor and CGT union reps. They left after assurances that there 'd be round-table discussions the next morning about internal problems at the lycée. A General Assembly took place yesterday morning (Wed. 29th), followed by a demonstration, though I've got no details yet.

The demands are not yet a critique of miseducation, or of the futureless world this miseducation is preparing kids for, but totally within the boundaries of normality: withdrawal of the project of abolishing the national plan for lycées, against over-sized classes and withdrawal of the plan to extend retirement age to 62. But, being self-organised and a practical break with normality they point to a different perspective.

Meanwhile, close to the Spanish-French border, 2 excessively normal demonstrations took place yesterday: one against the European austerity measures, like the one in Brussels, with unrealisable capitalist demands ("stable employment for all", etc.). The other was one by customs officers at Perpignan who were demanding withdrawal of a plan for 15th October to suppress all border controls in the area, which would mean some of them losing their jobs; they cited uncontrolled drug trafficking and illegal immigration as the inevitable outcome of this plan, but that's not going to happen as customs officers in France can stop cars and lorries anywhere throughout the country, without the need for borders. Both these demos were organised by the CGT.

There 's been a total blockade of Marseille port since 5a.m. today by dockers. Tomorrow there are the routine mass demonstrations throughout the country which might not be so routine, hopefully.

On October 12th there's another one-day General Strike.

A nurses' and anaesthetists' demo in Paris, blockading the Ministry of Health, was tear-gassed today by the CRS. Very healthy

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The Champs-Élysées, in Paris, was blocked by several hundreds of anaesthetist nurses on strike, simultaneously occupying rue de Washington nearby. Pushed back by the cops they went to rue de la Boétie, briefly blocking the ruling party's (UMP) HQ. Then there was a semi-blockade, with 2000 strikers, of the restaurant Le Fouquet's, well-known for having hosted Sarkozy the evening of his presidential victory. They threatened to have a total blockade of the Ministry of "Health" on Monday (on 18th May the anaesthetist nurses blocked the Gare de Montparnasse for 5 hours, so they've got some kind of reputation).

These are union-organised demos, and related to the project of partially de-skilling anaesthetists. If/when I have time, I'll try to contribute to analysing the contradictions of these developments in greater detail.

As for the schools movement in Ales mentioned in my previous posts, on Wednesday 29th, the cops successfully intimidated the school students from any action other than a General Assembly, united round the everyday expression, "Même pas peur!" (literally "not even frightened" - but "No fear!" might be better - though it's usually used in a socially critical way that "No fear!" in English isn't). Thursday 30th: leaflets distributed outside the J-B Dumas school early in the morning, with a human chain round the entrances, the school being totally blocked, with a non-human barricade finally set up late morning. Later, the kids' demonstrating were attacked with tear gas by the BAC ("anti-criminal brigade") from Nimes, about 45 kilometers away. Nimes is Sarkozy's military and police base - over the years he's developed personal and very powerfully entrenched contacts there.

Meanwhile, Thibault, head of the CGT, was very publicly (on TV) verbally abused by a CGT worker/member: I missed it, but apparently it was along the lines of "This creep sits down with the government in the negotiations sipping wine, oblivious to our situation..." (very rough translation: friends told me last thing at night, and I didn't ask them to repeat it).

October 4th:

Just saw a report (not in the media) about a blockade of a lycee in Le Vigan, about equidistant from Montpellier and Ales. Doesn't say when this was, but it was dated yesterday, a non-school day. These are just things fairly close to home - what's happening in other areas is anyone's

guess.

Briefly about the lycee in Le Vigan - this was the 2nd bockade this term, essentially over the headmistress stopping all kids' leaving the school outside of their class times, including during the lunch hour, which is normally allowed in schools in France; the first blockade was removed without conflict by the cops (don't really know about the 2nd one except that it's there). The specific grievance doesn't preclude more general themes, and the retirement age issue seems to be, as far as i can gather, increasingly used as one of the reasons' for action (pretext, really - talking to teenagers on Saturday, retirement was pretty much the last thing on their mind - it was more like "it's all crap", "scary future" stuff).

The unions - CGT, Sud and Force Ouvrière (but not yet the CFDT) - have called for the general strike on the 12th October to be of unlimited duration.

The Marseille docks strike (CGT controlled) has already been declared unlimited and has spread to the refineries. Corsica is curenly suffering/enjoying a significant shortage of petrol. But nothing was done to stop ships bound for Marseille being re-routed to Toulon and Sete.

And according to *Théorie Nostrodamiste* the revolution is due to begin on 14th October, just after teatime.

October 8th:

Quote:

The unions - CGT, Sud and Force Ouvrière (but not yet the CFDT) - have called for the general strike on the 12th October to be of unlimited duration.

Got this wrong - the media are talking of the "*spectre*" of an unlimited general strike, but so far only some sections of transport, in particular in Paris, plus Total refineries and the Marseille dockers have actually declared for one, though there do seem to be moves to spread this a lot further.

The government, not wishing to back down, has thrown few crumbs of comfort for the unions or the PS (Socialist Party) to chew over and spit out to their members - so few they're not biting: a slight retreat on the qualifications for retirement age for *some* mothers with 3 or more children, and for those with severely handicapped children . Obviously rejected.

If Tuesday's general strike continues amongst significant sectors beyond that day, they might try to throw bigger crumbs because a significant section of the ruling class is not into the "No turning back" Thatcherite imitation of Sarko and his gang, and I'd guess they still have some influence on them. As I've said before, they're scared that this unbending strategy could provoke something equally unbending against them (though optimism about such an eventuality minimises the problems, an important part of which is the lack of self-confidence of the working class). Of course, the spectre of terrorism could overshadow the spectre of communism as it has done in other countries before, and allowing an atrocity to happen is always an option for the State.

Strauss-Khan, neoliberal head of the IMF, is now favourite for the head of the PS in opinion polls - which is good news for Obama and Merkel, who, as I said before, prefer him to Sarko. If he stands for president I'll be backing the "Vote Sarkozy without illusions" campaign - a crude dumb bourgeois is far less dangerous than a subtle intelligent one.

October 8th:

More news of schoolkids struggles:

Yesterday, 7th October, High school students (15 and upwards) in Millau (Aveyron, in the Languedoc-Roussillon region) at Jean Vigo Lycee put up a blockade of the school, followed by a demo of 200 students. During the demo, the cops tried to arrest 2 teenage boys, falsely accusing them of climbing onto cars in order to get into a "college" (for 12 to 15 year olds). The other high school students surrounded the cops (kettled them), who, visibly ill at ease, waited in vain for reinforcements, and left without arresting them after 15 minutes.

The Jean Vigo school is named after an anarchist film director of the 1920s whose most famous film is about naughtiness in schools -

Quote:

Zero de Conduite ("Zero for Conduct") ... a silent movie from the 20s which influenced the recuperative movie "If" in the late 60s; Vigo is now accepted within the mainstream of French culture, with media libraries named after him - but that's down to the enormously recuperative power of French capitalism, in particular its culture (mind you, what, worldwide, isn't co-opted into the system in some way or another over half a

century, and often a lot less, afterwards?

(from [_Escape from Alcatraz](http://dialectical-delinquents.com/?page_id=100) - http://dialectical-delinquents.com/?page_id=100)

Maybe the teenagers were inspired by the school riot at the end of the film.

Don't know what, if any, were the demands of the schoolkids. Perhaps they had no demands - in which case, they should all be condemned by all right-thinking lefties.

This, by jef costello on the [kids riot in dover](http://libcom.org/forums/news/kids-riot-dover-academy-04102010#comment-400551), (<http://libcom.org/forums/news/kids-riot-dover-academy-04102010#comment-400551>) is relevant:

Quote:

It might be handy to remember that while the walkouts and demos by schoolkids in France there is quite often a strong element of agitation by teachers who are unwilling or unable to strike effectively.

There are also quite a few cases of large groups of school kids getting the shit beaten out of them because they haven't been to demos and have no idea how to deal with the police. Also younger kids tend to let their bravado take them further when faced with riot police than older heads and they consequently take a beating.

As far as I know, there's been nothing in the media about this blockade (except, probably, very local media). Local TV news has concentrated on a very conventional schools protest in Beziers (also in Languedoc), where teachers and students have been protesting outside of hours because of the non-replacement of teachers, so either causing greater class sizes or the simple cancellation of classes with no teacher to give lessons. And a bit on the continuing strikes and demonstrations in Bagnol sur Ceze mentioned in the original article above - a strike about the incoherence' of the timetable, which sounds like a pretext (nothing wrong with that, obviously), but is , in fact a good reason to strike given the stupid contradictions miseducation and the world of work impose on us - often it means parents can't pick up their kids without losing work, or having to rearrange it, or even that kids have to drop a subject because the time of it clashes with another one....

.....

Just seen national TV news, and they're saying that 116 lycees were disrupted by protests yesterday, with altogether 15,000 high school students demonstrating in the streets. At last they

re beginning to get themselves an education. One guy at a school in Riom (Piuy de Drome) said they'd be out on Monday and all week, with a General Assembly going on from day to day; their demands are for the withdrawal of the extension of retirement age, though I have a sneaking suspicion that worrying about what's going to happen to them in over 40 years is not the most pressing thing on their minds. They looked very happy - getting high without drugs. A far cry from the crying misery over-dramatised (though partly representing true aspects of teenagers' lives) by TV series like *Skins*.

There is also an increase in university student movements - mainly concerned about studying so as to be on the dole later. Also a car workers demo, but I didn't catch where.

And, by the way, an inter-professional union, UNSA, has withdrawn from participating in the national General Strike, which the media are trying to hype up as a move towards a possible collapse in the cohesion of the strike. "Free together" is it's slogan - maybe they should change it to "Free champagne together at the negotiating table with Sarko" - though doubtless you can think of something a lot funnier than this. No surprise about this small union. On the demo last Saturday I spoke to one of this crowd for the first and last time, asking them who they were as, living such a sheltered life, I'd never heard of them. I said something like how our enemies wouldn't be at all scared by such passive demos, to which the guy said "Enemies is too strong a word". When i said that a minimum take on Sarko was that he was an enemy, the guy laughed at me - "Don't be silly - we have no enemies - that's a rather war-like expression"; I walked away, abusing him as the group ganged together with derisory sneers.

Car workers protest yesterday was inside the Paris world car fair, disrupting the show with its media hyped electric cars (a snip at 30,000 euros or more - and 90 euros a month to hire and recharge the battery). Organised by the CGT, which is rapidly having to look ever more radical - even to the point of publicly disciplining that section which collaborated in attacks on the *sans papiers* in June last year (iirc). No critique of the economy that inevitably makes cars pretty much a necessity for the majority of people, nor of eco-capital that claims you can reform it all - but then what do you expect of a union, a structure whose form, content and goals assumes "a social function which escapes the control of each union worker and the ensemble of union workers; a social function necessitated by the very logic of commodity production and consumption" (Chris Shutes, *On The Poverty Of Berkeley Life*, 1983)?

Thursday 7th October, in Vилleyrac in Languedoc-Roussillon, there was an interesting - in form at least - low-level protest by mothers against HGVs driving through the small town centre. They simply walked back and forth endlessly across a zebra crossing, pushing pushchairs with teddy

bears in them - something that disrupted traffic for hours, and is not technically illegal. On TV the HGV drivers shrugged and said " well, it's the quickest way, with the lowest fuel consumption - and we're paid to be on time". Can such a contradiction be resolved within capital? A by-pass might help, though they're not necessarily quicker or lower on fuel consumption. Of course, this level of argument for some doesn't seem worth going into - but if it's worth pointing out the irrationality of accepting the "inevitability" of the commodity economy whilst complaining about its effects, then such details have to be looked at.

The national TV news yesterday gave 6 as the number of blockades of lycees - but I personally know of 3 just in the Languedoc area and the news mentioned 3 other cities where there were blockades (Carcassonne, Limoges and 2 in Besançon), so - horror shock - the media could possibly be not telling the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth about this. Under the guise of suddenly revealing what's going on round the lycees (the national news kept quiet about it until yesterday), the media - and I know this could be upsetting for sensitive souls - could perhaps be hiding a bit of reality from us telly-gazers. In my experience the media often tell most of the facts except, sometimes, the crucial ones, and lie strategically - particularly at the point when it becomes important to undermine a social movement. They're not above appearing to publicise a critique of them either, particularly when it no longer matters much: I remember just after the anti-CPE movement a reporter speaking into a mike just in front of a clearly visible piece of graffiti which roughly said something like "Piss off, lying media manipulators!".

Top cop complained about how the schoolkids demos were "disorganised", unlike the classical demos, which, he said, were so much easier to control. A teenage girl said they were demanding the withdrawal of the extension of retirement age because of the prospect of more unemployment for them after leaving school/university/technical college (ie more older people employed = less younger people employed) - a contradiction resolvable within capital only through war, I'd guess (not saying this dogmatically - maybe others can think of other capitalist solutions for this). She added, "It's now or never - because later will be too late". She seemed well-rehearsed and political as compared with a teenage boy in Carcassonne, who was all excited, speaking very fast, saying how they'd have a General Assembly all next week because they were all fed up. Sarkozy complained about adults inciting schoolkids to join the demos and strikes next Tuesday, but so far he hasn't made such agitation illegal. The Ministry of Education emphasised that 116 lycees represented less than 3% of the total.

And I've just heard that after last Saturday's national demonstrations, a shopping precinct in Rennes was blockaded (compare with [this](#) during the anti-CPE movement - the bit from 18/3/2006, Montpellier, the Polygone Shopping Centre) - up to 250 demonstrators blocking it for

an hour during heavy rain, with a little General Assembly' taking place on the spot. The blockade involved collectives of the unemployed (from Rennes, Brest, Paris & Marseille) who'd come for a week-end conference and trade union members of the CNT, SLB, SUD éducation, SUD étudiant, SUD rail, SUD ptt (post office) as well as numerous unaffiliated individuals. A General Assembly was held on Monday 4th October elsewhere in the town, calling for the extension of the movement to the withdrawal of the latest "regressive" and racist laws.

As I said, a couple of posts back - wouldn't mind some feedback and additional information/anecdotes/analysis, particularly from those living here in France or with good connections here. Though appreciated, the encouraging words from allybaba and Steven above aren't really enough. Also feel that what's happening in France, as well as Spain and Greece, should be given a bit more of a high profile than sandwiched between "Maoist theory", "Point out spammers here", etc. Though maybe this suggestion comes a bit too soon, I really think this *could* be bigger than the 2006 anti-CPE movement, maybe even *a lot bigger* (certainly no false optimism implied - I re-emphasise the *could*, and people should seriously think of all the things that could prevent it developing, and not just the critique of looking towards the unions to take the initiative). So - if things start getting even more interesting, both here and in the rest of Europe, I suggest something with greater focus than just one thread amongst hundreds, but something rather like you did with the anti-CPE movement.

Dinosavros (Oct.9th):

I was talking with a French guy I know a few months ago and this is what he told me about the retirement age in France. He said that the government that lowered it (was it Mitterand? I can't remember) did it as a populist strategy to gain votes and that in reality it was not a sustainable position for the government to keep because of the extra money spent on everyone's pensions. So basically the government has no choice about raising the retirement age or not, it is something that it must do in order to keep the economy from collapsing. I have no idea how true this is or not.

This reminds me of the economic situation of the government in Greece - the government has to cut spending and increase revenue fast, so it attacks the workers' pensions, salaries, bonuses, increases VAT, taxes etc. The answer from unions and the left is that "the rich should pay for the crisis and not the working class" which sounds very good in principle but doesn't take into account that increasing taxes on the rich increases the likelihood of them simply moving out of Greece (since capital is international) and makes Greece less attractive for foreign investment. This would lead to a general economic weakening of Greece which would affect not only the government but also the working class. This is a commonly used pro-capitalist argument but I don't have an argument against it. Apart from locking in the flow of people and

capital at the borders like North Korea or something extreme like that - which anyway would require a totalitarian state and would lead to international embargo at best, foreign invasion at worst - I can't think of a solution.

The classical revolutionary position is that the solution is a complete rejection and overturning of the current economic system, abolishing private property, money, classes, the state etc and that this must happen in more than one country at once. This is a very different position from the movements of workers who are protesting against changing specific economic measures.

I am throwing this out as a question (in the wrong thread I suppose) because I am not sure about where to stand in relation to all of this. Economics has never been my strong point as I always found it boring but I am beginning to feel more and more that I should be studying it; in arguments both lefties and capitalist apologists can run circles around me as soon as we begin talking about economics.

Oct.11th:

First - **latest news is that a call for blockades on all French High Schools (lycees), and General Assemblies round all these schools**, was made yesterday evening through the teenage grapevine - SMSes. How much this will actually take place we shall see. I'd guess that this was some National Union of Lycees and Colleges initiative, but not at all sure, and won't comment about it until I know for certain. The Minister of "Education", Luc Chatel has denounced the "irresponsibility" of outsiders who put lycee students in danger: *"Demonstrating in public places is dangerous - the high school students shouldn't be in the streets"*.

Though transport throughout the country is going to be disrupted tomorrow, I suspect that it won't be as much as hoped; at the height of the anti-CPE movement there was still a great deal of public transport functioning; not nearly as solid a strike as the transport strikes of 1995. Tomorrow, UNSA which has a significant base amongst Paris traindrivers, is scabbing on the strike. However, air transport will probably be significantly disrupted, and not just within France as the traffic controllers are threatening to strike. Gas, electricity and France Telecom workers have also threatened to have an indefinite strike (a strike voted for each day, to be continued if considered "necessary") along with the others mentioned above. And outside the port of Marseille 50 massive tanker ships remain blocked by the dockers' strike (primarily against the privatisation of the ports) now in its 3rd week. This is threatening to cause the closure of petrol stations in parts of the country later this week.

Opinion polls, for what their worth, say that at least 69% support this movement, but support'

doesn't mean all that much unless it's practical, particularly as only 31% support an unlimited strike beyond Tuesday.

Me:

Dinosavros said:

Quote:

This is off topic to the news thread...I was talking with a French guy I know a few months ago and this is what he told me about the retirement age in France. He said that the government that lowered it (was it Mitterand? I can't remember) did it as a populist strategy to gain votes and that in reality it was not a sustainable position for the government to keep because of the extra money spent on everyone's pensions. So basically the government has no choice about raising the retirement age or not, it is something that it must do in order to keep the economy from collapsing.

Don't think what you say is off-topic *at all* - I mean, these separations of news', theory', history' etc. are for convenience, and a way of showing the particular emphasis of the texts submitted. In reality, though, these things can't be separated. Discussing whether the retirement age can be kept at 60 is obviously relevant because the retirement age question is the **pretext** for most of the current movement. I feel the same way about economics, but don't feel lefties and capitalist apologists can run circles round me, as for me reducing economics to a specialism, to something separate, is part of the problem. The PS is currently promising to lower the retirement age back to 60 (though whether they'll do it at election time is another question). I'd half-agree with the French guy you know, though qualify it: the PS could return the age to 60 but they'd have to make *enormous* cut-backs in State expenditure elsewhere to recover the loss, along with massive hikes in indirect taxation (VAT, etc). Given the enormity of the State deficit, the austerity attacks in France (and in Greece) make more capitalist sense than perhaps in the UK - which is why the State's virtually unbendable and which is why all the leftist blah is rather like Scargill during the miners strike trying to be reasonable' (within capitalist terms) didn't make sense - you either struggle for a community against capital with ideas as part of this struggle or you get caught up in all sorts of uselessly complex contradictions by talking the language of your enemies. Capital flight - disinvestment - is a real possibility and has to be taken on board as part of the problem of international struggle. But capital flight can/will take place as a result of a significant uprising - with or without tax hikes for the rich, I would have thought . And Lefty arguments still assume some relative autonomy of each nation state, or else they hope they

could get back to this relative autonomy; either way, it's an impossible utopian capitalist perspective. It's all or nothing....

...yes it was Mitterand that lowered the retirement age (in 1983). In the 1960s, apparently, less than half employed men reached retirement age before dying; clearly this is the way forward for the State: you'll be entitled to a pension at any age and at 1000 euros a day, just so long as you've died 5 minutes before.

The call for blockades and general assemblies at all high schools seems to have been anonymous - a kind of snowballing SMS spreading possibly everywhere like a chain letter against chains.

General Strike In France

Oct 13 2010

Yesterday - 12th October - there was a General Strike in France - the third in 5 weeks (the others were [Sept. 7th](#) (<http://libcom.org/news/mass-strikes-france-over-proposed-increase-retirement-age-07092010>), & Sept. 23rd (see Developing Struggles in France). Possibly as many as 3,500,000 marched in the streets for the withdrawal of the extension of the retirement age from 60 to 62 or from 65 to 67 for those only eligible for State pensions.

The strike was pretty extensive, effecting both French and international capital (for example,

Ryanair alone had to cancel over 230 flights). Though the strike was certainly not total it involved air traffic control, rail and buses, refineries, schools, universities, gas and electricity sectors, docks, post offices, weather forecasting stations (who made sure the rain, for the most part, didn't scab on the strike), tax collecting offices and loads of other sectors - even some municipal police went on strike (the poor things are openly complaining about suicidal depression because of the stress). Blockades and General Assemblies appeared fairly extensively and many sectors will continue the strike indefinitely. Loads of lycees (High Schools) took part, with even the Ministry of Education admitting to over 230 blockades (though the State's statistics are only slightly more reliable than the "99.9% for Ceacescu"-type election results the old Stalinist regimes put out). Many of the lycee strikes have been launched through Facebook or SMS, though there are a couple of Unions, often with hidden political agendas, behind them as well.

And, of course, there was the traditional mini-riot at the end of the Paris demo as night fell, without which no large Paris demo is complete.

In itself this doesn't sound very interesting - another 24-hour General Strike over some detail of government policy, one, moreover, that seems fairly unimportant to those who can only retire at 65, as in the UK (possibly the majority of those who read these threads and news items). But this detail is rapidly becoming merely a pretext for a more total critique of this sick stupid society.

Take this roughly translated leaflet, which I've only just seen, announcing the showing of a film from the movement of 1986 about the "Lascars" ("likely lads"/ "rascals") of Lep (see: [1986-87: France Goes Off The Rails](http://dialectical-delinquents.com/?page_id=235) - http://dialectical-delinquents.com/?page_id=235) - to be shown on Thursday opposite a school in Ales in Languedoc-Roussillon, a school which has been an important part of the current blossoming of lycee (High School - for 15 and up) blockades :

Quote:

Fast forward and no retreat!

Reform of the retirement age, attacks on immigrants, sackings, massive stoppages of unemployment pay for the unemployed and more widely, a growing repression of all those who are poor, young or marginal...The State wants to guarantee the bosses "favourable" conditions of exploitation.

This policy goes beyond national borders. In Spain, Greece, Portugal, Germany or Ireland....the same “austerity plans” are concocted in ministerial offices. The rulers' aim is to dynamise the economy confronted by global competition.

And this is going to make us keep our noses to the grindstone, to slave away, to “tighten our belts” for the interests of the class in power!?

If the same political logic is found in the four corners of the Earth, it's for the “necessities” of economic development and certainly not for the population. The capitalist system always concentrates wealth more and more. The means of production are concentrated in less and less hands. To continue this road, the system can only intensify social violence. No State, no government will change a thing. The engine has been started up and the institutions which depend on it grease its wheels without restraint.

The only force that can derail it is ours': that of the exploited, the excluded, those without a future...It's vital to intensify the movement and organise the convergence of different struggles. The battle launched by High School students, by train drivers, by dockers....is born out of the same refusal to accept the fate reserved for us. The secondhand car sales talk of the unions and leftist parties reinforce our separations for their own interests and sell-by election dates. It's by acting together that we can get out of our isolation and so see our battles succeed.

The emergence of a strong autonomous and radical social movement, necessitating the participation of all proletarians, is an urgent and obvious need, essential throughout the world.

Wherever we are, let's get together and struggle to build a real and concrete resistance.

Contact: uncollectiflutte@riseup.net

The strike has continued in some sectors today - in Paris, for instance, only 25% of trains were running this morning, causing massive traffic jams (though, as with the Ministry of Miseducation statistics, these statistics seem to change constantly even though they cover the same periods of time, probably depending on the balance between the stress being heaped on the statistics compilers and their valium/cocaine intake). And everywhere there are several lycees which didn't come out yesterday which are coming out today. Likewise, sporadic General Assemblies are springing up all over the place, proposing things like blockades of banks, disruption of traffic by means of turning roadworks to subversive use, occupations of social security offices - but so far

today it remains to be seen what comes of these types of proposals.

The demand for the withdrawal of the retirement age extension within capitalism is essentially a demand by those who don't want to face the anxious necessity of having to make a revolution even to achieve the smallest improvement in their condition: capital can only withdraw this reform by even bigger attacks - by making enormous cut-backs in State expenditure elsewhere to recover the loss, along with massive hikes in indirect taxation (VAT, etc). Such people don't want to draw the obvious revolutionary conclusion even from such a fairly minor aspect of intensified misery as the extension of the retirement age. They'll probably vote for the PS (Socialist Party, an increasingly neo-liberal racket with the IMF head, Strauss-Khan, as the favourite for the next presidential candidate). The PS is currently promising to lower the retirement age back to 60 (though whether they'll do it at election time is another question). Given the enormity of the State deficit, the austerity attacks make more capitalist sense than perhaps in the UK - which is why the State's virtually unbendable and which is why all the leftist blah is rather like Scargill during the miners strike trying to be reasonable' (within capitalist terms) didn't make sense - you either struggle for a community against capital with ideas as part of this struggle or you get caught up in all sorts of uselessly complex contradictions by talking the language of your enemies.

Capital flight - disinvestment - is a possibility in the not-so-long term and has to be taken on board as part of the problem of international struggle. And capital flight can/will take place as a result of a possible significant uprising - with or without tax hikes for the rich. Lefty arguments -"vote for us and we'll turn the state into your servant" - still seem to assume some relative autonomy of each nation state, or else they fantasise that, with them riding to power on the backs of some social upheaval, they could get back to this relative autonomy; either way, it's an impossible utopian capitalist perspective.

It's all or nothing.

I could - and will - say a lot more, but for the moment, check out [these poster slogans \(http://juralibertaire.over-blog.com/article-une-petite-auto-reduction-apres-la-manif-57585426.html\)](http://juralibertaire.over-blog.com/article-une-petite-auto-reduction-apres-la-manif-57585426.html) from the 23rd September strike, from Tours.

Comments:

Varlet:

Quickly, a few things police-related, as a footnote:

A couple of days ago, a police union denounced how the official figures indicating how many people demonstrated on Tuesday were a joke and not credible. In Marseille for example, unions indicated 230 000 protesters and official figures 24 000. A 1 in 10 difference. I agree that figures on their own do not tell much about the movement though. But its quite rare that even the police say the government is manipulating the figures...

[Article here](#) (http://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2010/10/12/un-syndicat-de-police-denonce-un-maquillage-de-s-chiffres_1424704_823448.html)

Generally the police have been busy beating up people or shooting them with flash ball guns. A number of students have been injured, including one in Montreuil (Paris area) by a flash ball, possibly filmed here:

[Article and video here](#) (<http://www.article11.info/spip/On-est-de-la-presse-Nous-tapez-pas>)

The Head of Police in Paris has just suspended the use of flash ball guns for now due to the severity of the student's injury around the eye.

Goes out without saying that all the well-meaning left-leaning humanists are outraged by how the police "misbehaved" and should not have made such a "mistake". At each demo they seem to discover that the police can be violent but they never understand that its not a mistake. Its what they do.

Anyway, there was more student mobilisation this morning in Montreuil, near where the student was injured on Tuesday.

Here's a video of journalists being seriously hassled by the police. Its translated into English too: [Article and video here](#) (<http://www.article11.info/spip/On-est-de-la-presse-Nous-tapez-pas>)

You can hear the idiots saying "dont beat us up we're from the press we're not like the others". Pathetic but typical behaviour from those journos. No sympathy for the protesters and illusions about the police behaviour. Guess that one got what he deserved... Then same again, the whole corporation was outraged by the police behaviour, demanding an enquiry, etc... Those who have been seriously injured but werent from the press wont get no enquiry or sympathy from the journos. The implication being that they probably deserve beating up...

See here for example

[Article here](#) (<http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2010/10/14/echauffourees-dans-le-calvados-l-intersyndicale-d>)

[enonce-une-agression-policiere_1425858_3224.html](#))

About the movement and the mobilisations etc, theres information on the websites below (in French again sorry). Im not saying they're good or bad but they could be useful to people:

Reports on Indymedia

<http://paris.indymedia.org/>

General information about strikes and mobilisations:

<http://www.7septembre2010.fr/>

<http://engreve.wordpress.com/>

Anarchist websites:

<http://www.federation-anarchiste.org/>

<http://www.c-g-a.org/>

General articles:

<http://rezo.net/themes/retraites>

Let's strike until we retire!

Me:

I think the reason for the Paris Head of Police suspending the use of flashball guns is because the government is telling them to hold back on any violence for fear of provoking a greater explosion. This is not just my opinion - but also others' in different parts of the country. In 2006, Sarkozy, as Minister of the Interior, explicitly told the cops not to be nasty to students and lycee students - and was very worried when a guy (a postman, iirc) got battered by the cops and was in a coma - worried he might die because in 1986 during an explicitly anti-government policy (the Devacquet reform) movement an Arab got killed by the cops and all hell broke loose - and the government had to withdraw the bill virtually immediately. Between movements it's considered by the State to be more or less ok for the cops to deliberately tip over and kill banlieux joyriders on scooters or motorbikes (the media are more obviously compliant, for one

thing) - but part of the reason May 68 exploded was because the cops were so blatantly vicious. The State prefer to use the cops in our heads, more deeply entrenched nowadays in France than 40 years ago, than have to resort too much to those in uniform.

Hieronymous:

French high school students block the access of the Arago high school in Paris October 15, 2010 during a fourth day of a nationwide protest against pension reform. The placard reads "Arago in the street. Sarkozy, you are done!".

UPDATE (as of early Friday) from *Mouvement Communiste* comrade in Paris (with percentage of strikers in each sector):

Private sector:

Citroën Aulnay less than 150 strikers (among 4000). Renault Flins same figure.

Public sector:

Post office in Paris no more than 40 % , in fact 33%

Education 15% with some local exceptions due to specific problems

Health 30% but this could vary. Strong contingents in demonstrations (Paris Orléans Quimper ie places where we have been)

Paris Metro less than 33% and variable according to lines

Paris bus no figures but less than 20 %

Paris RER B strong exception 75 % due to some historical and specific conditions (these workers will be transferred from RATP Paris transit authority to SNCF french railways)

French Railways:

Up to this week few participants above all to assemblies. This weeks strike has been going on

for three days but figures (for engineers) do not reach half of what happened in 1995. Comrades say that the mood is not here.

Exceptions:

Total oil refineries: 66% of strikers and on-going blockades that can lead to fuel shortages. Because for a year Total has had a restructuring plan to close many refineries (6/12)

Marseille dockers: specific strike in a stronghold of the Stalinist CGT

Marseille city council workers are in competition between CGT and FO union and struggles against right wing mayor

Nord Pas de Calais in these two northern departments a "left" Stalinist CP has launched Italian style strikes of a few hours in about 30 factories (Alstom, Bombardier, but not Renault nor Toyota) blocking production with less expenses for workers.

New development:

Secondary school students have appeared in the demonstrations with some school blockades by a minority. But the government has given orders (for political reasons and with the policy of preventing strikes from the beginning) to police to smash demonstrators which has happened in some Paris suburbs and some provincial towns like Caen, where a young demonstrator was brutally beaten and whose condition is between life and death.

On the contrary, in Montélimar 200 demonstrators escaped the control of a union-led demo and smashed the city council, while in Saint Nazaire workers confronted the police in front of the Prefecture gates (local tradition) and of 57 arrested, all were workers.

UPDATE excerpted from [World Socialism Web Site](http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2010/10/fran-o15.html)
(<http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2010/10/fran-o15.html>):

Of particular concern to the government was the rising wave of high school student demonstrations. Yesterday [Friday, October 15] roughly 900 of France's 4,302 high schools were on strike, of which 550 were occupied. At the same time, demonstrations with hundreds or thousands of students took place throughout France.

Students marches (and number of participants):

10,000 in Toulouse

8,000 in Rennes

7,000 in Bordeaux

5,000 in Brest

4,000 in Reims

2,000 each in Orléans and Tours

1,500 in Montpellier

1,000 in Caen...

At the SNCF national railways, most workplace assemblies decided to continue strike action. According to press figures, 4 in 10 TGV high-speed trains, 50 percent of Paris regional trains, and 40 percent of non-TGV long-distance trains were running.

Strikes are also hitting ports, oil terminals, and refineries. Tug crews are on strike, shutting down the docking of all vesselstankers, bulk freighters, and container trafficwhich remain off French ports.

With 11 of mainland France 's 12 refineries affected by strike action, particularly around the strategic Fos-Lavéra oil center in the southern port city of Marseille, there are reports of gasoline shortages throughout France. These are widespread in Corsica and southern France, but are also taking place sporadically around the country in cities including Nantes, Amiens, and Paris. Several gasoline depots have also gone on strike, blocking delivery from Fos, Bassens, and Le Havre facilities...

UPDATE excerpted

from **Reuters**

(<http://www.reuters.com/article/2010/10/15/us-france-pensions-idUSTRE69E43320101015>) news

story (Friday October, 15):

Striking French oil refinery workers shut down a fuel pipeline supplying Paris and its airports on Friday and airport workers grounded some flights as protests mounted to derail an unpopular pension reform.

France's airport operator played down worries of fuel shortages, but strikes at all of France's 12 refineries and fuel depot blockades have prompted motorists to stock up on petrol.

Truck drivers also were set to join the fray as momentum built for a day of street rallies on Saturday...



A protester throws a tyre on a fire set to block the entrance to fuel storage depots in Caen on Friday.

Me:

First about the lycee student who had a flashball fired in his eye. Apparently all the guy was doing was putting dustbins on the barricade - nothing but that (and this comes from people who are not into playing the outraged lefty), when a BAC cop, having just participated in the eviction of a squat nearby, came along and gratuitously fired the flashball. The media are saying it was a riot cop (CRS). The only explanation for this lie is that the CRS have a generally recognised reputation for being thugs, particularly after '68, when, amongst other things, they were known to have raped women arrested in the riots. The BAC (set up under the PS president Jospin), however, get an inordinately good press, being portrayed on national TV as sad victims of banlieux estate ambushes, etc. They presumably want to maintain this image for those who have no direct experience of them. By the way, this is the second time the cops have fired a

flashball into the eye of someone in the small but volatile Paris suburb of Montreuil in just 15 months - the last time being in summer 2009, fired in the face of a demonstrating squatter. That time the guy lost his eye - but this time, the good news is that the kid' is going to be able to see in both eyes. The 2009 guy was a "politico", and it happened without a national movement going on, so it got hardly any dominant media coverage. No "outrage" that I know of. But the current outrage has been just verbal so far - a demonstration yesterday immediately following the news that the guy could lose his eye never got further than shouting. The cops in people's heads remained pretty much in power. No talk of an eye for an eye.

The lycee students are increasingly on strike, even according to the Ministry of Education - the highest figure they gave, though they changed it later, was 350. The UNL (Union Nationale des Lyceens) gave out the figure of 900, and, given that almost all the ones in Montpellier were on strike, I'd guess that their figure is quite a bit closer to reality than the Ministry of Education's. Everywhere, school students are blocking traffic, and setting fire to small things like bins stacked against school fences. There are also condemnations of these burnings by the more strait-laced, who rush to put them out with their mineral water bottles, telling the media that this is ruining a serious political struggle, whilst the cops arrest more and more of the less delicate lyceens.

Lorry drivers are saying they're coming out next week, and all 12 oil refineries are now on strike, though so far, the strikers and the unions have let the gendarmes take over the gates and allow petrol tankers to go back and forth. But the bosses of some airports are claiming that there's only enough petrol for planes up until Tuesday (19th October) morning, the day of the next - the 4th this autumn - General Strike. A train driver on telly just said that they want this to extend to all Europe, because it concerns everyone there as well.

There was a riot in Lyon yesterday, and lots of little confrontations all over the place. But the unions and the PS are emphasising negotiations all the time - and, given that this evening, with national demonstrations this afternoon, could well become riotous, I'd guess that the government will back down over its refusal to negotiate and the Unions and Socialists will grab the chance of dampening down the flames if lack of petrol doesn't dampen them down beforehand.

I'll say more tomorrow when I have a bit more time, probably through a blog, because admin might have it set up by then. I'm now off to the demo.

Jef Costello:

Samotnaf wrote:

In 2006, Sarkozy, as Minister of the Interior, explicitly told the cops not to be nasty to students and lycee students - and was very worried when a guy (a postman, iirc) got battered by the cops and was in a coma - worried he might die because in 1986 during an explicitly anti-government policy (the Devacquet reform) movement an Arab got killed by the cops and all hell broke loose - and the government had to withdraw the bill virtually immediately.

In 2006 I think the orders were more about not directly attacking demonstrations during the day. The demonstrations always got more dangerous towards night (as you know). There were also plenty of cases where the police incited people to attack demonstrations and allowed people to cross police lines to do so. The postman was Cyrile Ferez iirc he got beaten by the police then the CRS dragged him into the road and marched over him at least twice before moving him again then finally dumping him somewhere. He actually made a full recovery in the end but he was in a coma for days.

Thinking back the flashballs were used fairly sparingly against students at the time, they were used pretty indiscriminately in the banlieues (especially in 2005). Samotnaf, this is good stuff, I'm just catching up on your reports now. All the other contributions are great but your work here is very extensive.

France - The Cold Autumn Hots Up

Despite the colder weather, and the increasing lack of petrol, the social movement is hotting up, fueled by fun, fire and fury. "Operation Snails' Pace", strikes, mini-riots, schools blockades, General Assemblies, occupations, and today the 4th 24 hour "General" Strike since 7th September ...but where is it all going? What contradictions aren't being confronted? Read on...

Lorry drivers yesterday joined the movement, with the explicit aim of "blocking the economy". They have been launching "Operation Snails' Pace" (going slow on major roads and motorways) around Lille, Toulouse, Lyon, Bordeaux, south of Paris, Tours, Frontignan, Arras, various parts of Normandy and lots of other places - officially there were 30 "go-slows" around 15 different towns yesterday. This, on the day *before* the Union-called "General" Strike called for today, Tuesday October 19th: "General" is in inverted commas because clearly there've been loads of people who have continued working in those sectors which have officially come out on strike. Some of these go-slows' lasted only 20 minutes, but others for several hours. Ordinary cars

go-slow in the fast lane, because big lorries aren't allowed there.

Various petrol depots have been blockaded. Despite the government claiming on Sunday that only 200 petrol stations have closed down, the organisation responsible for producing petrol station statistics said yesterday - Monday - that 1500 have closed; and the amount of petrol stations that have run out of Unleaded 95 or Unleaded 98 must be a great deal more than that. This shortage is as much to do with the refineries' strikes and blockades as with the dockers strike which has left at least 60 tankers stuck in the Mediterranean, unable to embark.

Lycees continue to be blocked (*officially* - ie Ministry of Miseducation figures - 260, but 600 according to UNL - the Union Nationale de Lyceens). There have been mini-riots and stand-offs with the CRS in at least 5 towns - Nanterre just outside Paris, Lyon, Lille, Mulhouse and Borges. So-called "casseurs" (literally "breakers": see this text from 1994 in English [777777 sommes tous des casseurs](http://libcom.org/library/1994-nous-sommes-tous-des-casseurs) - <http://libcom.org/library/1994-nous-sommes-tous-des-casseurs>) have been attacking this and that all over the country, sometimes intelligently, sometimes indifferently, sometimes stupidly and sometimes really nastily.

In Marseille the binmen have been on strike for over a week (joining the dockers and the refinery workers). The rubbish is upsetting the tourists, who are anxious to consume the new gentrified areas, brought in by artists and the construction of a modern tramway, free from the stench of revolting proles. The mayor is also upset. Marseille is already preparing for the year it becomes the Cultural Capital of Europe in 2013. With Ryanair withdrawing from its airport base there, giving the term capital flight' an almost literal meaning, the project of bringing in the punters from the four corners of the globe could well be grounded. All that glorious regeneration of a nice cleaned up surface, designed to reduce all sense of a past into a souvenir photo, could be destroyed by radical subversion. A binman said, "*We're the proletariat, we can't just sit and twiddle our thumbs.*" Though this possibly comes from an old-style CP-influenced guy, in the atmosphere of Republican ideology where everyone is encouraged to describe themselves as a "citizen", this is a refreshing reminder of a basic socially antagonistic truth. A 16 year old from Marseille, Sarah Jlassi, added "*This has gone beyond pensions, it's about our unjust, divided society.*" ([The Guardian today- http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/oct/18/french-strikers-cause-stink-marseille](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/oct/18/french-strikers-cause-stink-marseille)). Though this is certainly at the centre of the movement, youths in the media and on the street, from *whatever* background, are constantly saying how stressed their parents are after work, how consequently they can't communicate with them. A few years back, the mayor brought in the army to clear the rubbish. Whether he does so again, in the current more generalised climate of class war remains to be seen, but he could encounter more frustration than merely Ryanair's O'Leary playing hard to get. Certainly in the

longer term - the overtly radical milieu' there has long been organising against gentrification and the *cultural* rubbish that's going to fill the streets in a bit over 2 years time (a translation of [this text on art and gentrification](http://libcom.org/library/occupation-art-gentrification) (<http://libcom.org/library/occupation-art-gentrification>) has become very popular there over the last 18 months).

In Languedoc-Roussillon, where I live:

Nimes (Gard county), all the lycees closed, and there were sit-ins at the prefecture. Ales (also the Gard) - a blockade of the railway lines, with fires to keep warm. Firemen were on strike throughout the Gard, only answering the most urgent calls. In Perpignan, 150 strikers blocked a petrol depot for 4 hours, with tyres burning all over the roads. A train driver supporting the blockade said on telly, "*This is not just about retirement but about the whole future of this society*", though the different ways of understanding the implications of that are about as many as there are people who feel the same way. 200 teachers occupied a local state institution (didn't catch what it was). A firetruck was attacked with stones.

In Frontignan, near Sete, 300 train drivers and truck drivers, plus others, blocked an oil depot, beginning very early in the dark morning - stopping distribution in 3 counties. A train driver said, "*We're doing this for the future - for our grandchildren*", though they were also clearly doing it *for themselves*. The cops, preceded by a nicey nicey reasonably-toned Prefet (head of administration for the area) asking for a calm dispersal, unblocked the depot in mid-afternoon without resistance - 300, in a fairly isolated spot, not being enough against cops armed with tear gas and flash balls. However, the expulsion was immediately followed by a mini-General Strike in the Frontignan area. Aude also had a blockade of an oil depot up till mid-afternoon. In Montpellier the "concierge" (security/surveillance office) of a lycee was completely wrecked by fire. And many of the windows of this lycee were "broken" (they're very thick top security windows, so none of them shattered) by 50 or so hooded youths. A teacher, who quite possibly objected to this reasonable attack, had a molotov thrown towards her, without touching or injuring her at all. She called them terrorists. The school was evacuated. On Friday 15th October, 60 or so youths attacked the blockade of a the top notch lycee in Montpellier ("Joffre") - the BAC (anti-criminal brigade) and suspected RG (equivalent of Special Branch) cops had been seen in their cars outside, leaving just a minute before the crowd of youths arrived. The youths also attacked "college" (12 - 15 yr olds) students, and went on to attack another school nearby, this time going through the dormitories robbing what they could. A car with a couple in it was overturned outside this school, and apparently a tram driver was stabbed in the hand. A radio journalist told a teenage girl he was interviewing that he had inside

information that they'd been manipulated by the police, though he never actually broadcasted any of that (probably for fear of losing his job). Clearly, however, the degradations of life on the estates and the gang mentality that survival engenders, means that some youths don't really need to be manipulated - they see everything in terms of a dog eat dog world, and it will take some considerable risk of a dialogue between those who identify with and participate in a more general social movement and these more nihilistic but utterly directionless youths to shift this to the advantage of both. Certainly moralistic finger-wagging is the last thing that will influence any change in this area: it's part of the world they rightly hold in contempt, but cannot see or struggle or really want to find any way out of. This is not helped by the catch-all condemnations of anything that involves violence as "*casseurs who've got nothing to do with the movement*". The local press was full of condemnation of these acts (though some of the worst, surprisingly, weren't reported) but when the headmaster of Lycee Joffre pushed the gate onto the hand of a blockading school student and broke his wrist, this was played down as an accident'. At another school in town, an anti-blockade teacher on the inside of a gate blockaded on the outside pushed a large barrier (that had been placed on top of the dustbins that are the main structure of lycee barricades) back onto the pavement, narrowly missing seriously damaging the faces of a couple of students. A parent who politely warned the teacher of the dangers of what he was doing was later punched in the face by this teacher. But blanket criticism of "casseurs" is a convenient way of ignoring these contradictions, and of not looking at what is fine and justifiable and what is sick in "casseurs" actions.

Lycee youth chant of the week: "*In Parliament the MPs jerk off all day*" (it rhymes in French and they sing it).

A lot more could be said, and I haven't even been to develop the answers to the questions posed in the introduction, but I've got to go now. Apologies for the lateness, and insufficiency, of this: internet, computer and personal problems have caused the delay.....

For the moment, check out these brilliant (well, half of them were written by me, so that almost goes without saying) texts on some of the past history of social movements in France:
France Goes Off The Rails (on the movement of 1986-7)

-French strikes - 1995-6

Notes on the French movements 2003

Culture in danger - if only! (on the movement of casualised cultural workers, 2003-4)

Notes on the lycee movement, 2005

Brief notes on the riots of November 2005

All quiet on the French front (on aspects of the anti-CPE movement, written during the movement)

Comments:

Steven:

The comment about youths going through school dormitories robbing, do you mean they were robbing pupils there, like happened a few years ago?

Me:

- they weren't robbing off them directly, but stealing things when they weren't around
- .Update:

The Ardennes region has just declared for an indefinite General Strike - this throughout the region and not confined to a specific union; though this is, afaik, an across-the-board Union call and in practice it remains to be seen what happens, it's an interesting development.

From the State side, however, things are also getting heavier - eg yesterday a squat in a remote area of the Cevennes in the Gard, that had been squatted for over 9 years, was evicted by gendarmes and bailiffs. The squat - of a massive, though somewhat wrecked, baronet's house - had an autonomist/anarcho-ecologist reputation. And last week, after a fascist-organised demonstration in Beziers, a 75 year old guy, who shot (in the back) and almost killed 2 clearly unarmed young Roma women burgling his house, was released on bail. See [this](#).

Portuguese translation of the main article here:

In Indymedia Portugal: <http://pt.indymedia.org/conteudo/newswire/2567>

In Indymedia Brasil: <http://prod.midiaindependente.org/pt/blue/2010/10/479855.shtml>

Oct 19 2010

France - The Hot Autumn Continues



Lycees blocked by school students

Oct 21 2010

Two leaflets about recent events. More detail will follow later.

Two leaflets, roughly translated:

Tuesday 19th October: Nanterre - a day of resistance!

For several days, the lyceens (High school students) of Nanterre have been on strike, blocking their schools. At the end of last week, the movement was heavily repressed. The forces of order beat up several youths during a demo. A lot of serious injuries, numerous arrests and trials set for December 2nd.

Today, just as the school students were about to block their school again, they saw, as they arrived, the "forces of order" had already been mobilised . Faced with being prevented from continuing their movement, tension mounted up until a confrontation. Us students were there and demonstrated their support for the school students against police brutality. After the General Assembly of the University we demonstrated in support of the school students, walking from the High School to a gathering in front of the police station there to denounce the repression and the arrests of dozens of High and Middle School students!

They call them "casseurs" ...?

From the Right and the Left and taken up, for the most part, by the media, the High school students on strike have been treated as “casseurs coming from the estates”. The words “ High school students” or “youths” are never used to describe them. Why? To delegitimise their struggle. To make these youths seem like uncontrollable savages who ultimately deserve such treatment. To vastly intensify the fear of “public opinion” when the police speak of “urban guerrillas or “organised casseurs”. Except these youths are High school students on strike, revolted by the condition of their lives. The real “casseurs” are those who produce this anger, those who demolish our social benefits, who privatise, who promote racist laws and laws for our “security”!

Where is the police repression?

Why don't they speak about Geoffrey, the High school student from Montreuil who had a flashball fired into his eye last Thursday and risks losing an eye? Why don't they speak about the High school student in Caen who had his skull smashed? Or about the numerous police interventions in the High schools which ended up with loads of injuries and mutilations? The bourgeoisie and their media go-betweens has launched these events, which explains the fury of the High school students. For far too long now the youths of the popular areas have been represented as barbarians, almost animals who in the end deserve their social condition and who have to be brutally put down when they dare contest their situation.

On whose side must the social movement be?

The social movement must support these young people - their revolt is just, legitimate and they are the first to be effected by the present social situation. Their fight is ours! - we must be part of it!

Let's create committees of struggle whose bases are workers, students, High school students facing the development of fascistic conditions.

Solidarity with the striking High school students! Down with the repression!
For the unity of the struggle: workers, students, High school students!

<http://agen-nanterre.over-blog.com/>

In Paris: youths attacked by the demonstration stewards of the CGT, Tuesday 19th October 2010

CGT demonstration stewards, cop pigs - same struggle!!

During the demo this last Tuesday, 19th October, the demo stewards of the CGT, collaborated with the cops (everybody knows - it's no secret) who committed new forms of violence when encountering some young demonstrators who were marching joyfully and noisily, whilst burning some flares. It seems obvious that the colour of their skin determined the choice of youth beaten. We witnessed some really nasty violence used (beatings with truncheons, tear gassing). Lots of youths were really shocked, not understanding anything any more - "We did nothing - why did the police do that?" ...We encircled the demo stewards in order to try to calm the situation - but we also immediately received, in response, beatings with sticks and tear gas. They were immediately joined by plain clothed cops, openly happy to have their "work" facilitated by them. We didn't see the arrests, but it's not outside the bounds of possibility that the demo stewards handed the kids over to the cops. People talk a lot about the "gratuitous violence of the casseurs", but very little about that of the cops (several serious injuries at demos and blockades, lots of arrests, kids locked in the cells) and that of the complicity of the racist demo stewards.

Certainly these texts over-simplify things a bit, but they are a good slap in the face for all those who crudely ideologise all "casseurs" as thugs. A great deal more has happened, and certainly more can and will be said. But for the moment, I'll leave it at that.

France - Work or prison!

Oct 22 2010

Very brief report before bedtime:

The most important thing that's happened today, about which the UK media is conveniently silent, is the vicious repression of the oil depot pickets. Today at dawn at the oil depot in Grandpuit, Ile de France, 50 kilometers from Paris - the forced requisitioning of striking oil depot workers by the State and the brutality of the gendarmes. The gendarmes were also armed by a quiescent French media that presented 3 people beaten up by these pigs as "light injuries" even though they were lying semi-conscious on stretchers. The workers had the choice of prison or work. The unions' response was pathetic - a lot of cries of shame', the end of democracy' etc. but no attempt to spread the strikes further - after all, this was an attack on the right to strike which last happened during wartime (ie under Petain).

Yesterday the same thing happened at Donges oil depot, though that time the CGT union did a deal with the gendarmes and the rest of the army - "we'll allow you petrol if you allow us to strike." Well, US capital continued supplying the Germans with iron and steel during the war, so why shouldn't the CGT do the same for *their* apparent enemy? And doubtless the petrol helped the gendarmes get to Grandpuit today to do their thuggery and enforce fascistic forced labour. Arbeit Macht Frei. Work or prison - increasingly not much of a difference. The Union prison guards just want Sarko to negotiate with them, and for this reason they've shown themselves torn between the thrill of revolt and the security of complicity. But you don't show weakness to a rabid dog unless you want to encourage its viciousness.

France - 1 Day General Strike Called In Guadeloupe, Martinique & French Guyana



Guadeloupe 2009

Oct 27 2010

The French Caribbean departments of Guadeloupe, Martinique & French Guyana officially, through the LKP (a vast coordination of parties, unions, local community groups etc.), went on a one-day General Strike today, called as a warning of a more extensive one to start on 14th December in protest against the rising cost of petrol, electricity, food and water. There was a large demonstration in the capital Pointe-à-Pitre. These areas are part of French territory and are ruled by the French State, though with a tradition of struggle usually independent of the struggles of the mainland.

In January 2009 a massive strikewave lasting about 6 weeks

(see:<http://libcom.org/news/revolt-continues-french-caribbean-16022009>) won extensive temporary gains, which have been increasingly rescinded by the bosses. It's partly for this reason that this current strike has been launched, though obviously the fact that the mainland has also had a strikewave is another factor. That this has been launched at the same time as the strikes (but not the more general movement) on mainland France are beginning to decline, but just before what the ruling spectacle hopes to be the final *coup de grace* of these strikes in the form of a possible, maybe even probable, damp squib of a one-day General Strike tomorrow, Thursday 28th October, is the reason for the almost total silence of the mainstream TV and radio media about this strike. At the same time, one has to ask oneself why the LKP are delaying the main struggle until mid-December, and why they've even delayed up till now, considering the social movement on the mainland.

Up to 30,000 (according to the LKP) demonstrators marched as part of the strike (6500 according to the obviously fixed cop figures). Obviously the LKP has an interest in exaggerating the figures - it boosts their image and they hope to boost the movement by pumping it up. Whilst such exaggeration, typical of almost all the reports (on what's been happening elsewhere in France) independent of the mainstream bullshit, temporarily excites people and maybe even pushes them to participate, longer term it can only help to demoralise them since they feel manipulated as things turn out to be very different from how they've been portrayed.

Not much more to report on this situation in the Caribbean so far.

But...

...the main national news today is clearly an ideological attack on the movement in mainland France. Presented as indisputable fact, it's about the scientifically proven dead cert, that in the year 2060 1 in 3 of the population will be over 60 and there'll be at least 200,000 people over 100 years old, of whom, on current trends, only 1 in 10 will be male, clearly a wonderful future chance for those current 50 year old heterosexual males who manage to survive. It'll almost certainly only be the rich ones, even if this Nostradamus-turned-scientific prediction turns out to have some validity. It not only assumes that health and safety conditions will continue to be scientifically improved along the same trajectory as the last 50 years, but also ignores the massive ecological collapse and possible war, not to mention the Character Armoureddon of suicide capitalism if there's no revolutionary movement on a massive scale developing that will drive millions and millions to the only free choice the market increasingly offers: a living death or a death by their own hand. Of course, the real reason for the release of this scientific survey is not to prove the stupidity of science in abject submission to the demands of the market and the State, but to ideologically attack the ostensible pretext for the current social movement . Which is one reason why this pretext should be explicitly and very publicly superceded.

To be continued....

France - How many bridges have we got to cross before we get to beat the boss?



Oct 28 2010

Today is the 5th 24-hour not-so General Strike in France since September 7th. The refineries have returned to work, often under the pressure of "Work or prison", a wonderful choice resignedly accepted by the unions and by the workers resigned to the union form. Likewise the oil depot bockades have been dismantled with the help of the forces of disorder.

It remains to be seen what happens in the often more interesting movements developing outside the world of wage slavery, a world that, for increasing numbers, is tending towards a slavery with decreasing wages. What follows is just a glimpse of some of what s been happening round the country.

Ales:

Revolution roundabout.

In the South of France, the transformation of a crossroad into a roundabout costs the local taxpayers at least 100,000 euros but often as much as 350,000 euros. But it's all worth it - it's a constant endless job-creation scheme without which the 23% unemployment figures would be even higher. These roundabouts are ostensibly designed to cut down accidents, but in fact are

there to help make money for the road construction companies and the artistic street designers paid lucrative bundles to fill them with bizarre structures: small Romanesque arches and bridges, old steam engines coming out of a tunnel from nowhere, loads of massive palm trees, grotesque sculptures such as a vast bending sausage on top of a 10 metre high doughnut meant somehow to be symbolic of a bull's head (or maybe of people's sexless lives). All this appreciated by the tourists and functioning as a distraction for bored motorists stuck in traffic jams.

But during the current social movement a few of them become transformed in a socially creative way. The lyceens of Jean-Baptise school in Ales, in the Gard department of Languedoc-Rousillon, have been occupying the roundabout in front of their barricaded school on and off for about a month now (an account of this school movement is [here](#)).

14th October at night [this film \(url no longer existent\)](#) about the movement of High School students and of High School age apprentices at Lep Electronics was shown on a big screen in the middle of the roundabout. Food and drink (both alcoholic and non-alcoholic) was served for free around a brazier, amidst tents where the lyceens slept in the very cold nights. Various radical tracts were laid out on a tressle table. Not the usual aestheticisation of roundabouts.

A nurse came along bringing with her three homeless street people who'd come to support the movement. A mother was there to make sure her teenage boy was ok and to show her solidarity. Generally a friendly atmosphere with people chatting and exchanging ideas, jokes and anecdotes, though one aggressive self-styled anarchist thought it was bourgeois to say "please" when asking for a free beer (love is never having to say you're sorry, and anarchism is never having to say please and thank you). Then about 4 or 5 CGT union guys came along and got heavy with some anarchist - almost coming to blows until they were calmed down. They seemed to be there to teach the kids what to do, as if the kids hadn't already had enough of school. Earlier they 'd come and told them to uncover the CCTV camera that had been permanently watching them on the roundabout (they'd covered it for obvious reasons). Their reason was that the cops would descend on them if they didn't. As an interview with a top cop said "[the demo stewards] from the CGT ... [are] ... organised like an army, and collaborate well with the police." One agitated outsider pointed out that it made no difference, as the cops were there anyway in the form of the surveillance camera, and that keeping it uncovered just made the cops' work easier - they could sit and keep the piss sitting down in the comfort of a centrally heated video surveillance room.

During the day the teenagers, along with supporters, strikers, and unemployed had gone along to the office of the mayor with a large dustmen's truck, unloaded the bin bags, piled them up outside and set them alight. Since that day - about the 19th or 20th - there was a riotous demonstration there when a couple of teenagers got nicked for things other people had done. The demonstration - furious OAPs, teenagers and loads of people in between - marched to the

police station to demand they be set free, some getting inside and setting off a firework-cum-smokebomb. Others piled up rubbish sacks and bins against the police station and, as with the mayor's office, set a couple alight. It's cold there this time of year, near the Cevennes hills and mountains. A nice bonfire like this is just a way to make oneself glow. As the old 70s slogan used to say, "Keep Warm this Winter - Make Trouble!".

Proletarian shopping precincts

On the night of 23rd - 24th October arson completely destroyed a small shopping precinct, employing 50 people, in St.Etienne du Rouvray, near Rouen. No-one was hurt.

On the day of the last General Strike, Tuesday 19th October, a small section of the main demonstration split off from the rest and went along to the main shopping precinct, the Polygone, possibly inspired by the examples of Rennes, where a few weeks back about 200 closed down a shopping precinct for an hour and held a General Assembly there, an action which has been repeated in various forms with different degrees of success in different parts of the country. Possibly they were also inspired by this text (written by me), translated here, which had been published a few weeks previously:

A normal "business as usual" day at the Polygone [Montpellier shopping precinct] is miserable. Shoppers doing what those into, or forced into, the passive consumption of the status quo always do. We queue up in increasingly long queues because capitalism always has to cut the cost of labour - pushing, for example, increasing amounts of potential cashiers onto the dole (not that the tedium of wage slavery is worth defending, of course). We are bored to distraction, and distracted to boredom, for the latest expensive look, movie, sound, technological commodity or whatever. Consumption Macht Frei. The world of consumption is meant to compensate for the world of wage labour, and people work to find a little bit after the rent and necessities to consume. So the treadmill goes round. The teenagers hang out on those Dali-inspired lip-shaped sofas, trying to appear sophisticated so as to match the furniture, reduced to aesthetic objects in this superficially pretty world of relations mediated by images, behind which lies the brutality of class power, of the insanity of the market and its protector - the State. The State here is in the form of the security guards; paid the minimum wage, they console themselves with the pleasure of being maximum scum, puffing themselves up by endlessly hassling you for petty infractions. Teenagers who amuse themselves with animal noises or bird cries are surrounded by these killjoys and kicked out. The pleasure of destroying all pleasures other than those permitted by the commodification of everything. Tired customers resting by sitting on the stairs are told to move on, even though they obstruct far less than the endless useless things - advertising signs etc. - scattered around the dump. What's the point of

working for a pittance if you can't play at being a little Hitler or Sarko? Worship at the altar of the commodity or fuck off - that 's the message. But occasionally banality crumbles and the world of things falls apart. Saturday, the 18th March 2006, at the height of the anti-CPE movement, the Polygone was transformed for a short while into an arena of confrontation between the forces of life (the social movement against this world) - and the forces of death (business, the cops, money-terrorism).

A part of a demonstration against the CPE went into the commercial centre in order to centre themselves on a critique of commerce. They began shouting and chanting and singing, winding up the security people with slogans " Police everywhere - Justice Nowhere!", "Those who reap misery, sow fury", "General strike of all the waged workers", standard anarchist stuff at the time, but quite invigorating in the context of this indoor shopping precinct. No damage to anyone or anything, people talking in a generally friendly manner. Perhaps two-thirds of shops pulled down the shutters, but the third that remained opened were ignored - well, anyone with any sense or sensitivity doesn't start looting in such an enclosed space. And the cafés were still functioning. Some people started banging out a rhythm on the shutters, which harmonised with the chants, probably frightening those trapped inside, who had no idea what was going on (and obviously the shop owners kept them in ignorance). Someone accidentally knocked over a cafe chair, and suddenly the security guards threw a small table at someone and cut open his head, and then continued throwing chairs and tables - even though there were quite a few shoppers amongst the crowd, kids, handicapped in wheelchairs, etc; immediately after this a cop pulls out a big gun and fires a flash ball, and at the same time the CRS, who'd been summoned inside, fired tear gas - this with tourists etc around, and inside, so creating an atmosphere of panic. That's what they mean by Security' (a word issued by the Ministry of Truth). Everyone scatters, running outside, as the CRS start charging. Outside everyone starts running as the CRS rush out, they're hitting the backs of legs, though those who had the sense to walk, were not hit - a bit like dogs - if you show your fear, they 're more vicious. Then they closed the Polygone, with a line of about 12 CRS ready to have a go. Someone ineffectually chucks a bottle at the impossible-to-break glass front, and then they charge, the same guy pointing the flash ball gun at everyone, eyes glaring psychotically with a "come on - make my day" manic air about him, whilst they make an arrest behind him. Students are genuinely shocked by the tear gas. MidiLibre next day has a photo of security guards holding chairs, but just says there was an exchange of missiles (not true - it was only on their side, at least inside the Polygone) and doesn't mention the tear gas. It turns out that shop assistants and keepers had been told that the resort to tear gas was made to combat casseurs, which even if it had been true, which it wasn't, would hardly make sense - as if breaking a window is somehow worse than tear gas, flash balls and panic created amongst crowds inside, kids in pushchairs, etc. But then unthinking spectators will swallow and justify any old bullshit, even if it has no logic

other than numbing themselves to the callousness of the unjustifiable. No security guard was arrested for GBH, surprise surprise. At the University of Paul Valery at this time there was some graffiti which read "To be a security guard is filthy work" (and next to it was written: "But is there such a thing as clean work?"). 9 days later, on 27th March 2006, there was a bit of imaginative, if mild, revenge for the tear gas: 150 stink bombs were dropped in the shopping precinct. The finance/fictive capital-induced crisis hitting the world and the brutal attacks of the ruling class demand a response far greater than the anti-CPE movement of 4 years ago if the masses of individuals are to avoid massive depression, chronic isolation and intensified feelings of suicide. There are no solutions other than those you organise yourselves.

Since then, on the 23rd, there was an attempt at an auto-reduction at a supermarket in Scionzier, close to the French Swiss border. Just 15 people went along with the idea of distributing food for free to the strikers in the area. The tills were blockaded and there were negotiations with the manager, who, surprise surprise, was not convinced by their argument that wealth should be re-distributed. Faced with the immediate threat of the cops, they withdrew, hoping that at least their trolley-fulls of frozen food had melted after an hour. In June 2009 in Marseille an auto-reduction there was a bit more successful. 30 people, half of whom had said they didn't want to do anything illegal, filled to the brim 10 or 11 trolleys and tried to negotiate with the manager, who shouted immediately "No negotiations!". One guy said - "OK - lets leave with the trolleys!" and everybody just quickly rushed out with them, including most of the shoppers who'd not participated in the action up till then, but quickly decided that this was an opportune moment to increase their social wage by refusing to pay.

For the moment I'll have to leave it at that - there's a General Assembly I'd like to go to and i'm late. Apologies if there are some typos - the usual "too much to do too little time".

Just one final useful bits of help I'd like linked to [this cartoon](#) (url no longer exists):

This should be translated into French:

<http://www.booksatoz.com/witsend/tea/orwell.htm>

And this should be translated into English:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sb1y7UWpMdk>

Added a bit later:

One telly report said that at one of the crucial refineries (in my agitation I didn't catch which one) the CGT didn't even put the return to a vote - and then the other refineries followed suit (this was *after* Total had announced this morning - as a *fait accompli* - that the refineries would go back to work today; obviously the CGT did a behind the backs deal, which wasn't challenged by the workers). Plus the Marseille dockers have gone back. 59 petrol tankers were stranded

outside Marseille port this morning, now they're all charging into the harbour like the cavalry saving France from the striking Indians.

But the universities, having started blockading in earnest since just last Monday, are still blocking, and some have voted to blockade for the next week, including blockading the admin sections...

France - Brief Outline Of Some Of The Most Recent Events



"on strike": no classes today - no class society tomorrow

Nov 6 2010

Though the international mainstream media presents France as having returned to peace and tranquility, with the oil depots, petrol stations, refineries and tankers all returning to normality, functioning according to the law of value, bourgeois reality is still being contested in different forms.

The following is just a very superficial outline of some recent events. It is impossible to verify how much these events are being exaggerated or distorted through the rose-tinted glasses of

various revolutionary ideologists, as the alternative media is often desperate to pump up the actions of a few people to make them out to be far bigger than they are, just as the mainstream minimises things. On the other hand, some radicals, reacting to excessive exaggeration, also tend to minimise or ignore certain significant events. In this labyrinth, the struggle to honestly present the facts - without looking at them through either end of a telescope - isn't easy. I shall speak of what I know from people I trust or from first hand knoweldge in some future text. For the moment, apart from a couple of things, I'll confine myself to information gleaned from the alternative &/or mainstream media.

Yesterday, **5th November**:

At least half of the lycees in Montpellier were blockaded. No national news about this (or alternative news, as far as I can tell). However, the French National Front, Le Pen's gang, mention on their website the fact that there have been several blockades of lycees since the return from the All Saints holidays throughout France and they call for people to create anti-blockade committees by organising through Facebook (the original blockades by lycee students were organised by Facebook messages back in September). I've heard of definite blockades in Sete, Flers, Paris (Montreuil), Le Mans and Perpignan, though it's very likely there have been blockades in several other towns elsewhere too. Lyceens have been arrested in various places throughout the country, some for just throwing eggs. In Bayonne, the Bank of France was blockaded. No mention in national news. Striking nurses in a 3 week strike at the Tenon hospital in Paris used some complicated legal maneouvre, very rarely used, and which I don't quite understand, to avoid being requisitioned - to be forced back to work or face a high fine or imprisonment. 2 or 3 nurses remain there, under requisition orders, to give advice in the reception area. Mainstream news was of blockades of rail tracks by the anti-nuclear movement, with Greenpeace grabbing the limelight. This is because there's a vast quantity of highly radioactive nuclear waste being transported across the north of France to Germany; in Germany alone there are already 30,000 protesters waiting for the train, with 16,000 cops deployed.

On **November 4th**:

Blockades took place at the following airports: Bordeaux, Nantes, Toulouse, Roissy, Orly, and Clermont-Ferrand. This was in the mainstream media, as well as the alternative one. At Toulouse airport a guy said on the radio, *"We're here to mess everything up - it's the only way to get heard"*

At the same time, some incinerators continued to be blocked by striking pickets in the region round Paris. Various universities were continuing their blockades: Paris 7 & 8, Grenobles 2 & 3, Strasbourg, Rouen, Lyon, St. Etienne, Angers, Nantes, Rennes, Limoges, Toulouse and the obsessive symbol of those nostalgic for '68 - the Sorbonne was occupied, as well as Poitiers University. Several hundred blockading students blockaded the admin building of the University of Strasbourg, until the CRS paid a fiendly visit. A night-time occupation of Toulouse University was evicted by the CRS. Montpellier 3 was blockaded on October 25th, when a General Assembly of 800 or so voted by at least 75% to blockade the place during the All Saints holiday. The blockade was renewed on October 28th with just a 55% vote for continuation, a vote which ended in violence on the part of some of the anti-blockaders. But on Nov.4th, a long tensely heated (during an Indian summer) debate ended with the anti-blockaders winning by 66% . They'd been summoned by emails sent out by the University President and by Facebook as well: on the second day after the end of the holidays, the anti-blockaders' only argument , apart from the lie that the blockade was illegal, was that they wanted to continue with their degree courses, and from the very start they refused to listen to any other argument (next day - yesterday - on November 5th Montpellier 3, possibly the only university where the blockade was lifted, was the only university mentioned on national news).

In Angers cops prevented youths marching to the UMP (Sarkozy 's party) HQ. There was an Operation Snailspace on the A1 motorway between Paris and Lille. These are becoming harder and harder to carry out, as drivers often get a fine and many lost 6 points on their driving licences (the same number of points lost is imposed for driving which causes accidental death - manslaughter). There was a "Toll-free" blockade of the toll booth near Rennes - La Gravelle - allowing people to leave the motorway without paying the toll (this has often been part of the current movement - and is obviously very popular with motorists). Blockade of France3 (national TV station) in Vanves. Blockade of the Monet exhibition at the Grand Palais (Champs-Élysées), in Paris. "No Money for Monet" leaflet distributed. Blockade of a petrol dépôt in Guéret for 6 hours. Blockade of a bus dépôt in Villeneuve d 'Ascq - over 100 buses blocked. Partial blockade of the port in Brest.

Today - Saturday 6th November - there will be national demonstrations in most major towns and cities throughout the country.

“France against austerity” doesn't really convey the feelings amongst those people struggling in the country: *“France against being violently fucked up the arse without vaseline”* is probably a bit more accurate.

