To win the battle, the revolt of school and college youth must continue and become more deeply rooted

Six weeks of struggle of secondary school and college students against their conditions of study have begun make the government back down. Only the continuation and rootedness of the movement in the schools and colleges can really change the state of things.

Starting on 18 September in Créteil, the revolt in both secondary and higher education has shown great determination despite police repression. The demands are about material conditions: the run-down state of school buildings, the length of working hours, the lack of teachers and their non-replacement, as well as the complete rejection of the details of post-secondary school selection through the *Parcoursup*. School and college students perceive, correctly, that the situation is no longer acceptable. And they act accordingly. By blockades, demonstrations or absenteeism, they put into practice their rejection of school in its present form.

Yesterday deaf to their demands, today the government has recognised that they are well-founded and has announced the first concessions: "adjustment" then "replacement" of *Parcoursup*, "reflection" on continuous assessment, reduction in class sizes in the fifth year in certain secondary schools, recruitment of teachers, improvements to timetables, renovation of school buildings, creation of places in higher education, inflation of student grants…

So, plenty of promises, often vague and ambiguous, subject to the vagaries of budgetary debates or the presidential election. Mobilised youth know that they cannot be content with these promises. They know that they cannot trust the state or the politicians of all stripes.

The only guarantee of success is in their own hands: it is political organisation, in their places of study, with their teachers and other staff who recognise that their own class interest demands that they unite in combat with the pupils.

1. Why the state does nothing to stop the dilapidation of schools

The French state budget is in crisis. The main reason for it is the growing difficulty for all states in the world to finance themselves through debt.

As for National Education in particular, since 2024 up to the forecast for 2026, the budget, apart from pensions, grew by 0.6%. In a period of inflation, this means the real budget went down. In comparison that of the Ministry of the Interior grew by 7.6% and that of the Army by 21%.

In a difficult financial situation, the French state privileges armaments and maintaining order: it prepares for external war against its enemies and internal war against its own population.

As concerns education, the state allows the situation to get worse, waiting for the fall in the number of pupils to reduce the problem: from 2024 to 2026, the number of pupils fell by 2.4%. The state projects a continued reduction of 14.2% between now and 2035.

The present second school students can't wait. They don't want to be sacrificed for the future. But as for the state, it offers them police repression, with the same violence and the same injuries already inflicted on the Gilets jaunes, in 2018, the banlieue "rioters", in 2023, and the protesters against the Labour Law, in 2016, and the pension reform, in 2023

2. The function of parking and disciplining secondary school students comes before teaching

Companies need a workforce which is less and less qualified, therefore capitalist society no longer has such a need to educate young people. The role of school is to inculcate punctuality, obedience, hierarchy and competition. The principal function of school is to discipline the future workforce, the pupils. School is above all an instrument for the reproduction of the social order, under cover of citizenship. The school of the Republic is nothing other than the school of capital of which the so-called democratic Republic is its ultimate guarantee. It serves more and more as a child-minding facility so that parents can go to work, or a place to park the future unemployed which capital doesn't need apart from as a reserve army of labour.

In vocational education, this translates into a proliferation of bogus training courses with no career prospects and qualifications that are devalued in the labour market. The expansion of apprenticeships in vocational secondary schools serves only to provide a cheap labour force, and not at all to train apprentices or to provide them with stable, properly paid employment at the end of their apprenticeship.

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In general education the continuity with higher education is broken. If, before Parcoursup, pupils were subjected to arbitrary forms of selection, for example the draw, those were relatively limited. The first years at university operated as selection. Selection was based on aptitude, economic (coming from a family with sufficient means) as well as personal, to undertake a course of study. Today, selection happens before entry into higher ed, based on criteria always arbitrary and completely opaque but which have become the rule. These criteria leave no chance for individual choice: the school student does not choose their region, nor the reputation of their school. Without a successful path to higher education, general education is worthless in the labour market.

Finally, the move towards continuous assessment is not intended to make the baccalaureate assessment fairer, but to push those secondary school pupils who are most resistant to discipline out of education. It is in line with the SNU's attempt to regiment pupils.

3. Secondary school students refuse being parked without a future, state discipline and capitalist society

The refusal to be regimented, the collective walk-out from schools, and the confrontation with the institution demonstrate in practice, regardless of individual opinions, an active rejection of the present form of the school. More confusedly certainly, the idea of making their own way towards the realisation that school is a prison for the greatest number whose escape guarantees nothing in terms of a decent wage or tolerable working conditions.

This movement, from the fact of its composition, partly escapes from the crappy school student unions. All that remains for it to do is to make a qualitative leap towards self-organisation. Above all it has to be rooted right there where it all began, the schools.

Limiting itself to piling up rubbish bins in front of the gates before going into town to demonstrate risks strongly weakening the movement in the end. The systematic collective walk-out from the school immediately leads the movement onto the terrain of the police, of the maintenance of order. While public opinion may well be on the side of the school students, this terrain of confrontation is nowadays not favourable to the emergence of an autonomous collective political force. While it is obviously necessary to defend themselves, confrontation with the police as an end in itself leads nowhere.

Such is the lesson of 17 October. Despite their spectacular aspect, the riots, burning and looting which have happened under cover of the demonstrations against the capitalist school and the high cost of living have only been an illusion of popular strength, quickly dispersed by the armed men of the state. Rather than serving the political objectives of a movement which it doesn't care about, this pre-political violence has contributed to turning around public opinion, which was previously favourable to the fight of school and college youth.

With the approach of the new term following All Saints' Day, the government is counting on the fear of new violence and its empty promises to restore order in schools. The Minister for National Education said that "our young people need to go to learn", and their colleague from Higher Education added that "they have to stop blockading".

Rather than leaving the schools, it would be more relevant to go back and take over the schools, with the aim of transforming them into places of longer-lasting political organisation where activities which take place can be collectively decided. And this in close connection with the staff of schools who are on the side of the movement. Many of them have the same interests: to not work non-stop, to earn more money and to refuse to act as prison guards in the classroom. Education staff are called on to criticise in concrete acts their relationship of authority with the pupils which is imposed on them, and to put themselves not at the service of their boss, the state, but at the service of the movement as a whole.

The example given by a minority of teachers and other staff of putting themselves between the police and the school students is a first step in the right direction. The workers of "National Education" and the pupils are part of the same social class, that of proletarians, in education or not, in work or not. Their only viable perspective is to unite.

Assemblies in the schools
Teacher-student struggle committees
Coordination between educational establishments
Strikes and blockades decided collectively
Solidarity with other workers

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FOR THE REVIVAL OF WORKERS' INITIATIVE

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