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CONTRIBUTORS

Opinion | The young are rising against a world that has abandoned them

Young protesters across the globe refuse to accept a future written for them by billionaires, corrupt politicians and authoritarian regimes.

Oct. 31, 2026



A protester holds a French flag during a demonstration in Lyon, France. The uprisings in Europe express a growing moral awakening, a collective refusal to accept a world in which human dignity is sacrificed to private profit, democracy is hollowed out, and the young are treated as disposable, Henry A. Giroux says.

Laurent Cipriani/The Associated Press

By Henry A. Giroux
Henry A. Giroux holds the McMaster University chaired professorship for scholarship in the public interest.

Across France, Italy, Belgium, India, Serbia, and Albania, young people are taking to the streets, refusing to surrender their futures to a capitalist system that has abandoned them.

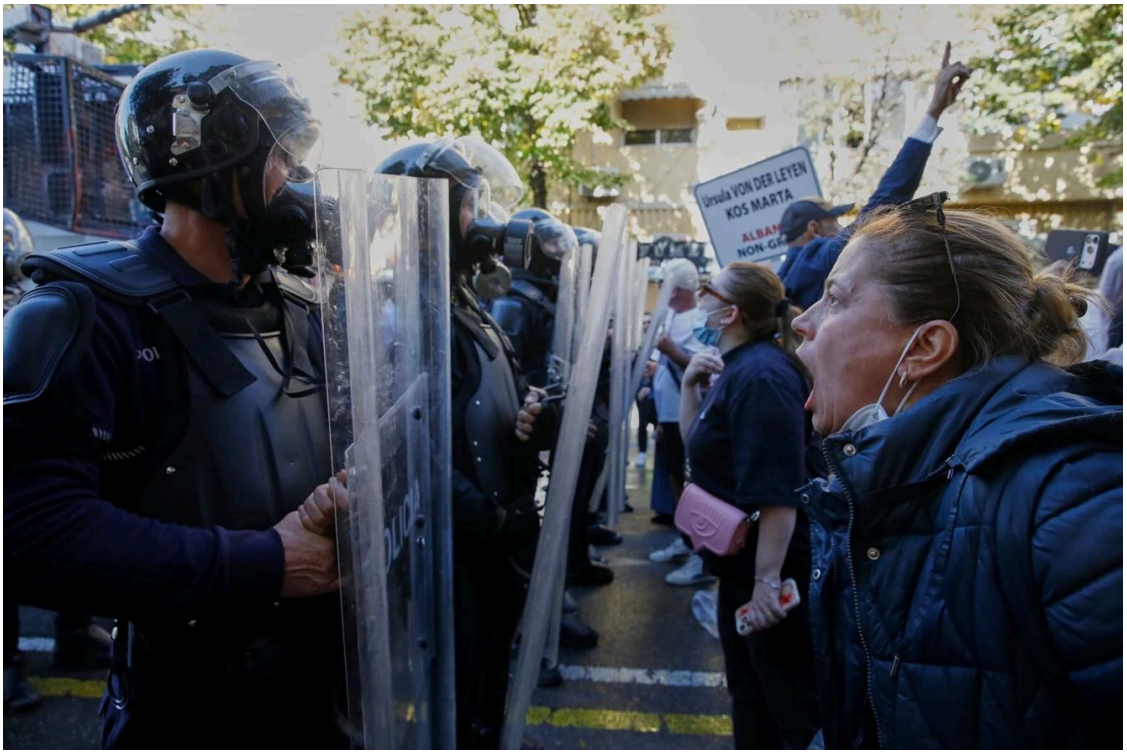
Their anger is fuelled by deteriorating schools, unaffordable housing, economic insecurity, political corruption and a ruling class increasingly indifferent to their needs.

As a 21-year-old protester in Milan told Reuters, “It’s vital to take part in people’s spontaneous movements born from an explosion of rage that made collective action possible.” She added, “I think the worst damage this ruling class has done to my generation is stealing even the ability to imagine a future, to dream.”

These uprisings are driven by more than economic grievances.

They express a growing moral awakening, a collective refusal to accept a world in which human dignity is sacrificed to private profit, democracy is hollowed out, and the young are treated as disposable.

Their protests are not simply demands for reform but a rejection of a political order that has turned inequality, cruelty and social abandonment into governing principles.



A woman shouts at riot police during an anti-government protest in Tirana, Albania, on Oct. 20.

Boris Grdanoski/The Associated Press

Two radically-opposed moral visions are colliding on the world stage. One is rooted in solidarity, justice and democratic possibility; the other in greed, racial hatred, organized cruelty and authoritarian domination.

What is at stake is whether coming generations will inherit a world governed by human dignity or one surrendered to the barbarism of the powerful.

The second morality finds expression in the billionaire culture of gangster capitalism, where technological achievement becomes an excuse for political cruelty, wealth provides immunity from accountability, and human suffering is treated as an acceptable cost of economic progress.

This is a political culture in which conscience is dismissed as weakness, domination becomes the measure of power, and the vulnerable are reduced to disposable lives.

Donald Trump's response to the youth protests in France reveals this authoritarian logic.

Rather than acknowledge young people's grievances over deteriorating schools, austerity, and inequality, he has portrayed the unrest as the consequence of immigrants flooding Europe and threatening Western civilization.

This is the poisonous logic of authoritarianism: erase the social conditions that produce resistance, invent racial enemies, and transform demands for justice into threats that justify repression.

The consequences extend beyond the United States. Canada cannot afford to regard these struggles as distant spectacles. Canadian universities are increasingly pressured to serve corporate interests, while austerity, precarious employment, rising tuition, and the housing crisis threaten to turn education into a privilege and young people's futures into commodities.

In Ontario, declining public funding and growing dependence on market-driven priorities undermine the democratic mission of higher education. The language of efficiency, competition, and fiscal restraint increasingly displaces the obligations of public institutions to serve the common good.

What Canada needs is not another generation taught to adjust to inequality, accept insecurity as inevitable, or confuse consumer choice with democratic freedom.

It needs young people equipped to question power, challenge injustice, and recognize that education is not simply preparation for the labour market, but a foundation for democratic agency.

This requires defending public education, strengthening social protections, and building alliances among students, workers, educators and communities against the concentration of wealth and power.



A protester held a board reading, "The world is ours," during a demonstration against rising living costs in Paris on Oct. 24.

Thibault Camus/The Associated Press

The young protesters across the globe are rejecting the neo-liberal fiction that individuals alone are responsible for their suffering. They refuse to accept a future written for them by billionaires, corrupt politicians and authoritarian regimes.

Their struggle reminds us that democracy is not a gift bestowed by the powerful, nor merely a set of formal rights and institutions, but an unfinished political and moral project forged through organized resistance, the relentless pursuit of justice, and a collective commitment to the common good.

It demands more than opposition to oppression; it requires the courage to imagine and fight for a future in which human dignity, compassion, solidarity, and equality are not empty promises but the living foundations

of democratic life.

Frederick Douglass understood what is at stake when he declared, “If there is no struggle, there is no progress.” He added, “Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.”

The uprisings of the young carry a message that authoritarians and ruling elites can neither dismiss nor silence: the task is not to make the machinery of oppression more tolerable, but to dismantle it and reclaim the future from those who have made greed, cruelty, and domination the governing principles of society.

Opinion articles are based on the author’s interpretations and judgments of facts, data and events. More details

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