

Strikes and protests mount against French labour law

Kumaran Ira
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As strikes and protests mount across France, social opposition to the unpopular labour reform imposed last week by Socialist party government without a parliamentary vote by using article 49.3 of the French constitution last week, is escalating. The pro-business law allow unions and bosses to negotiate contracts violating France's Labour Code, lengthen the work week, facilitate mass sackings, and undermine job security for young new hires.

Denouncing the PS government's regressive reforms and anti-democratic method, hundreds of thousands of workers and youth protested the law for the second time this week yesterday. According to trade unions, 100,000 marched in Paris and 90,000 in Marseille. Between 1,000 and 6,000 marched including in Saint-Nazaire, Le Havre, Rouen, Bordeaux, Lyon, Toulouse and Strasbourg, according to police. In Nantes, 800 people took part in a banned demonstration.

Sections of workers also entered into struggle, with truck drivers, transport workers and air traffic controllers mounting strikes this week. Truck drivers continue to blockade strategic part of highways nationwide, including access to the airport of Toulouse-Matabiau in the Southwest.

In Marseille, truck drivers blocked roads near the industrial zone of Fos-sur-mer. In the west, blockades were set up in Rennes and Nantes.

Six of eight France's oil refinery operation, including Total's operations in Donges, are disturbed by blockades, causing shortages in petrol stations. Near Le Havre, two refineries were blocked. In La Rochelle, the access to oil terminals were blocked. In northwestern France, some 70 Total petrol stations were out of fuel, almost a fifth of the network.

Yesterday train services were reduced by more than 50 percent by a second straight day of strikes. The

strike by air traffic controllers disturbed the traffic with the cancellation of flight, including at Paris Orly airport.

As social anger mounts against the law, President François Hollande's government is resorting to police repression against protesters after endorsing a protest mounted by the Alliance police union together with the neo-fascist National Front (FN) on Wednesday.

Yesterday, security forces violently attacked protesters. In Lyon, police used water cannon to try to push back protesters. In Rennes, police arrested 19 people in the subway they have placed in custody for "degradation" of public goods. In Nantes, the security forces used tear gas to prevent protesters from reaching the center of the city, behind the castle of the Dukes of Brittany.

1,300 people have reportedly been arrested during weeks of protest and 819 people have been held in custody, including some 51 with harsh sentences. Protesters told WSWS reporters in Amiens of a 22-year-old female law student, Manon, now facing charges for allegedly assaulting riot police during a peaceful occupation of the town of Amiens by the #UpAllNight movement on April 28. Prosecutors are demanding a five-year prison sentence.

Defying police repression, workers and students vow to continue fighting the law, denouncing the Hollande government's anti-democratic method to impose the law to pursue the attack on social and democratic rights of the working class.

A high-school student and a friend of Manon, Mathilde, told the WSWS, "I want to tell your readers that we are determined to continue until the law is withdrawn, and we expect more people to join us. With 49-3, the government is trying to use force, it doesn't care what we think. It is completely killing the

principle of democracy.”

WSWS reporters in Paris spoke to Romain and Pierric, two young workers in the demonstration at the Place de la Nation. They denounced the imposition of the labor law using article 49-3: “It’s ridiculous ... it’s a scandal. They have no strategy, they just do everything business wants. They have no way to argue for their rotten law, so they just try to ram everything through.”

They said that they were not surprised by the fact that the PS and its pseudo-left ally Left Front backed the protest organised the Alliance police union with the FN’s support. They added, “Now they are just going all-out with repression, their goal is to discourage protests, and to demoralise protesters so they do not mobilise ... They are willing to use any trick, of course, including the FN, it is not as if they had principles or ethics.”

Workers and student also face threats and attacks from pro-PS trade unions that feel compelled to organise protests to prevent social opposition from escaping their control and developing into a challenge to the PS.

In Marseille, a student, told the WSWS that the the General Confederation of Labour (CGT) personnel had attacked them when they were blocking a highway, adding, “Democracy is more and more under attack, the 49-3 disgusts me.”

Malia, another student, also criticized the CGT for attacking youth in the demonstrations: “The CGT tear-gassed us, they use violence with us even when we are being gassed by the riot police. They don’t let us shelter with them during the protests to be safer. So we are isolated, we get frustrated, and we want to be more independent.”

The struggle must be taken out of the hands of the unions and their student union allies, and develop into a broader struggle of the entire working class in France and across Europe against austerity, war, and the state of emergency.

The PS government will not give up the labor law despite growing anger, and workers and youth cannot rely to oppose it on the unions and pseudo-left parties like the New Anti-capitalist Party, who work closely with the PS. If the struggle remains under the influence of these petty bourgeois organisations, which have no base of support in the working class, the struggle

against the law will be sold out ultimately.

The PS on its part is signaling that, having passed its law, it intends to press ahead and prepare even further crackdowns against protests. Yesterday, Prime Minister Manuel Valls urged unions leaders to “take responsibility” to call off protests against the labor law. He claimed that turnout was waning and denounced protesters for attacking police.

He demanded that protests cease, stating, “If on each protest there are delinquents today, we must ask whether some of these protests are really justified. Anyway, [trade union] security staffs, working of close with the support of the police, must take all measures to prevent delinquents from joining in with the crowd of demonstrators.”

Valls also threatened to use police forces to smash roadblocks set up by truck drivers, urging the CGT to show “responsibility” on this issue.



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