

France: Protests lodged with Gaullist government over police provocations

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The Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR) has issued a formal protest to Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy and the head of the Paris police over police provocations during last Tuesday's national day of action against the Gaullist government's "First Job Contract" (CPE) legislation.

Undercover police posing as young rioters adorned themselves with stickers from the LCR and other student, trade union and left-wing organisations. More than 600 people, including 383 in Paris, were arrested during the April 4 demonstrations, which saw between 2 to 3 million people march against the government.

"Plainclothes policemen displayed LCR stickers so as better to melt into the mass of the demonstrators," *Le Monde* reported April 4. "The strange setup of the plainclothes police was noticed right from the start of the demonstration at the LCR's 'fixed base' at the Saint-Marcel metro station. 'There were about 20 of them in the midst of our members. We put pressure on them to leave and after a few minutes we tore off their stickers,' Pierre X, a leading steward, said. A few hours later the same jackets were again decorated with LCR stickers. Lutte Ouvrière, CNT and trade union stickers were also present on the front line 'in contact' with young demonstrators taking part in clashes with the CRS [riot police] in Place de la République."

World Socialist Web Site reporters present at the Paris demonstration on April 4 also witnessed what appeared to be undercover police or provocateurs wearing trade union and student union stickers. In a side street away from the protest's starting point, about ten riot police could be seen joking with a group of black and Arab youth dressed in the hooded tops favoured by the *casseurs* ("hooligans," literally "smashers").

"These are dirty methods which make provocations easy," the LCR's Olivier Besancenot said. Another

spokesman for the LCR told the *World Socialist Web Site* yesterday that they had not received a reply to their complaint from Sarkozy or the Paris police.

"We strongly denounce the police's use of these stickers and badges and the confusion that this can lead to," Jean-Michel Nathanson of the Solidaires trade union group told the WSW. "We are discussing what legal action to take."

A Lutte Ouvrière spokesperson reported that his organization was not taking any legal action at present, but said it supported the LCR's complaint. "We could be blamed by the youth for any actions taken by the police wearing our stickers," he said.

Groups of people at the anti-CPE demonstrations in Paris, described by the media as unemployed black and Arab youth, have assaulted student protestors, robbed people and shops, and thrown missiles at riot police. The government, together with the French and international media, has seized upon these isolated incidents of violence in an attempt to discredit the mass protests.

President Jacques Chirac made a point of denouncing the violence when he announced last week that he was formally ratifying the CPE legislation. "The demonstrations have been a pretext for unacceptable acts of violence and destruction," he declared.

The government has also attempted to use the violence to divide French youth by setting the French-born against the immigrants and the unemployed against the students. Sarkozy has spearheaded the government's divisive and provocative strategy. He made televised appearances alongside riot police before and after every national day of strikes and demonstrations. Before the March 28 day of action, he instructed police to "arrest as many thugs—that means delinquents—as you can."

More than 3,000 demonstrators have been arrested since the protests against the CPE erupted six weeks ago.

Further arrests were reported yesterday, as high school and university students blockaded roads and highways, disrupting traffic across France. High school students also blocked airline passengers attempting to enter the Orly airport. Railway lines were occupied in Paris, Lille, Caen, and Toulouse. According to *Nouvel Observateur*, five students were hospitalised after police violently broke up the protest in Toulouse.

There have been numerous incidents of police brutality. Riot police have fired tear gas and water cannons at demonstrators, and paint pellets have been fired at youth to tag them for arrest.

In the worst incident of violence, Cyril Ferez, a 39-year-old telecommunications worker, was beaten over the head with truncheons by riot police on March 18. Witnesses reported that the police then trampled over him, and refused to allow medical assistance for 20 minutes.

Ferez remains in a coma. Although his neurological state is reportedly improving gradually, a pulmonary infection required a tracheotomy earlier this week. The worker's family and his union, SUD (Solidarity, Unity, Democracy), have initiated a legal case against the police for aggravated assault.

Reports of undercover police operations in Paris last Tuesday underscore the provocative role of the government and the state apparatus. There can be no doubt that police agents and provocateurs have had a direct role in inciting and directing the *casseurs*. Police operating in the impoverished suburbs of Paris and other cities have long established networks of informants and agents, and manipulate criminal elements for their own ends.

Notwithstanding the *World Socialist Web Site's* political differences with the LCR, we unconditionally defend the organization and its members—as well as all other student, trade union and left political groups—against police violence and provocation, and support the LCR's complaint against the police and Sarkozy.

Sarkozy, Chirac, Prime Minister de Villepin and the Paris police must be held accountable for such flagrant attacks on democratic rights. A thorough investigation, independent of the government and the police, should

be undertaken to expose the role of police agents provocateurs in inciting violence and creating a pretext for repression.



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