# France: Government launches assault on immigrants

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A demonstration called by a broad alliance of anti-racist organisations has been called in Paris today, assembling at the Place de la République at 2 p.m.

The French government has launched a major racist offensive against immigrants. Despite the tenacity and extent of the protest movement against the First Job Contract (CPE—giving employers the right to fire young workers at will), which continued throughout February, March and much of April and witnessed days of action bringing up to 3 million university and high school students and workers onto the streets, the government is continuing its programme of reactionary legislation with the Immigration Bill. This bill, which will greatly increase the social and job insecurity of immigrants, is to be put before parliament May 2, without any disruption in its parliamentary schedule.

The Immigration Bill, proposed by Sarkozy, sets out to further criminalise immigrants by favouring what he calls "selective immigration" as opposed to the current "endured immigration." The automatic granting of residence rights to immigrants who have lived in France for 10 years will be suppressed.

The right of family members to join their families legally residing in France will be drastically curtailed. Families will have to prove that they can adequately provide for their loved ones, who will have to pass a test of being suitable for "republican integration into French society," a formula open to arbitrary interpretation by state bureaucrats. French people marrying non-EU nationals will no longer confer the right of residence on their spouses, who will have to return to their country of origin to obtain a long-stay visa having proved the validity of the marriage to the satisfaction of the French authorities. This costly requirement will often also be dangerous due to the political situation in many countries.

One-year temporary work permits will be cancelled if the employer sacks the worker. Three-year residence permits, entitled "Skills and Talents," will be granted only to people "likely to participate in the development of the French economy or France's influence in the world."

This initiative, fully in line with EU "Fortress Europe" immigration policies, which account every year for the deaths of thousands of migrants attempting to reach Europe by clandestine routes, particularly from Africa, will make a great number of people illegal and render them liable to contribute to Sarkozy's target of 25,000 expulsions from France per year.

As with the campaign and law against the wearing of the Muslim veil by girls in state schools, and the preposterous claims by government ministers that a significant element of the urban revolt in the autumn was comprised of the children of polygamous African families, racism is being stoked up by the government as a diversion from the social decay that has accumulated in France over the last 30 years and as a cover for deepening attacks on workers' and social rights.

In a speech before 2000 new members of the UMP on April 22, Sarkozy launched an open appeal to far-right voters. He gave the following warning to immigrants: "If there are those who don't feel comfortable being in France, then they shouldn't be uncomfortable about leaving a country they don't like.... You can't ask a country to change its laws, its habits, customs simply because they don't please a tiny minority. We have had more than enough of feeling obliged to excuse ourselves for being French."

He was not only targeting supporters of the National Front (FN) of Jean-Marie Le Pen and Phillipe de Villiers' xenophobic Mouvement pour la France (MPF—Movement for France), but also disorientated voters on the left, victims of decades of unemployment and social decay under successive governments of the left and right, especially in the previous strongholds of the French Communist Party and Socialist Party in industrialised regions of France. "I want to address also the ordinary left voters, those who believed in the Communist Party," he continued, "a certain number of men and women on the left can say that with us, that is going to change."

Philippe de Villiers is making his pitch for the presidential election by encouraging the climate of fear and hatred of Islam. In a book released this week entitled *The Mosques of Roissy*, the aim is to stigmatise all Muslims as terrorists. *Le Monde* quoted him as saying on radio last Sunday, "Islam is not compatible with the Republic. The Islamic presence is not marginal but real, profound and dangerous."

The leader of the Socialist Party, François Hollande, reacted to this racist filth with his own form of patriotism, saying, "The right does not have the monopoly of love for France." Indeed,

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the Socialist Party web site contains no detailed critique of Sarkozy's law. The brief comments it posts stress that the Socialist Party is more capable of controlling immigration than the present government. It proposes "new legislation on immigration, coherent, effective and respectful of the interests of our country and of those of the immigrants' country of origin."

Successive left governments since 1981, supported by the Communist Party, have practiced immigration control and the hounding of illegal immigrants. Any criticisms of the current Immigration Bill now being made by the left parties cannot mask their complicity in maintaining the government in power and enabling Sarkozy to renew his racist offensive, designed to divide the working class in preparation for deepening attacks in order to further the competitiveness of French and European big business on the global arena.

Less than a month ago, the government of de Villepin and Sarkozy was besieged by a mass movement of university and high school students and workers, which had the potential to bring it down. The fact that it now feels strong enough to continue its right-wing agenda is entirely the responsibility of the leaders of the left parties and the trade unions.

While the National Student Coordination, made up of elected representatives of the universities and high schools in struggle, called on workers and the trade unions to organise a general strike and to bring down the government, the trade unions and student organisations united in the *Intersyndicale* insisted on limiting the movement to the single issue of the withdrawal of the CPE. In fact, the CPE was only one element of a programme of attacks on job protection, social rights and anti-immigrant legislation.

The same position was adopted by 11 parties of the left—including the Socialist Party (SP), the Communist Party (CP), the Greens, and the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR)—organized in the *Riposte Collective*. They made no call for the resignation of the government, thus enabling it to continue its right-wing agenda. An LCR document sums up the opportunist attitude of the entire 'left' towards the Gaullist regime: "The National Committee [of the LCR] considered that the perspective of a dissolution of the National Assembly and new elections did not correspond, today, to the present phase of the movement."

In May-June 1968, the Communist Party and the Socialist Party and their supporters in the trade union bureaucracies opposed the development of the mass movement of students and workers into a political offensive to drive the government of De Gaulle out of office and to replace it by a workers' government. De Gaulle was able to retake the initiative and the French working class had 13 more years of right-wing governments.

Again today, the French government, thanks to the *Intersyndicale* and the *Riposte Collective*, has been able to cling to office after being temporarily pushed back by the mass movement. President Chirac and Prime Minister Villepin, according the latest IFOP poll of April 22, have popularity ratings of 29 and 24 percent respectively, dropping 10 and 13 points since the official withdrawal of the CPE on April 10.

However, by accepting the government's offer to replace the CPE with cheap labour schemes and cash incentives for employers, and by accepting Nicolas Sarkozy's invitation to participate in talks with the government and the bosses, the unions have passed the initiative to the most right-wing forces in the government, led by Sarkozy.

Sarkozy is the front-runner for the UMP (Union for a Popular Movement) in next year's presidential election and is setting out his agenda based on racism and the destruction of all social gains by the working class. The man who is now orchestrating dialogue with the "social partners," namely the unions and employers, is setting out to divide workers on the basis of racism.

The defence of immigrants and social and democratic rights urgently poses the task of a new revolutionary leadership based on an international socialist programme. The *World Socialist Web Site* is the central instrument for the building of such a new leadership. The WSWS is the Internet publication of the International Committee the Fourth International, which for decades has defended Marxism and the heritage of the Trotskyist movement.

The WSWS supports the right of workers to live and work and study in any country they choose, with full and equal legal rights. This is part of the struggle against the global attack on workers' rights and living standards in the epoch of capitalist globalisation. It requires the development of an international mass movement of the working class based on a socialist perspective that must unite workers of all nationalities, races and religions.

We oppose imperialist war and call for the immediate withdrawal of all foreign troops from Iraq and Afghanistan.

The major financial, industrial and commercial enterprises must be placed under democratic and public ownership and organized on an international and rational basis to eliminate poverty and provide secure employment and decent living standards for all.

The working class of Europe must unite against the capitalist policies of the European Union on the basis of its own program: the Socialist United States of Europe.

We invite all young people and workers to read the WSWSand join in the building of sections of the International Committee in France and throughout Europe.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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