

# France: Thousands march in Paris against immigration bill

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On Saturday, Paris saw its largest demonstration in defence of the rights of immigrants in many years. With some 20,000 participating, it was double the mobilisation on April 29, reflecting growing opposition to the immigration bill that is passing through parliament. The bill represents a sharp attack both on immigrants already legally residing in France and those wishing to secure the right to stay.

The demonstration was called by over 600 organisations for the defence of immigrants and the political parties of the French left, including the Socialist Party, the Communist Party, the Greens, the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR) and Lutte Ouvrière (LO), under the umbrella of “Uni(e)s contre l’immigration jetable” (United Against Throw-Away Immigration).

The coalition’s petition calls for the withdrawal of the new law, known as CESEDA (Code for the Entry and Residence of Foreigners and the Right of Asylum), but does not call for the repeal of existing laws restricting the rights of immigrants.

Marching together at the head of the demonstration were Jean-Luc Mélenchon of the Socialist Party, Marie-Georges Buffet of the Communist Party, Olivier Besancenot of the LCR, Arlette Laguiller of LO and Alima Boumediène of the Greens.

François Hollande, national secretary of the Socialist Party, and his partner Ségolène Royal, a declared admirer of Tony Blair, who is being boosted by the media as the most viable presidential opponent of Gaullist Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy in the 2007 elections, were not present. Royal has yet to comment on Sarkozy’s immigration bill.

Groups of hundreds of African workers marching behind the banners of local “sans papiers” (undocumented immigrant) support groups, as well as a large Chinese contingent, demanded their right to live and work in France. Many admitted that to demonstrate they had to overcome a sense of vulnerability and intimidation, which is precisely what the anti-immigrant legislation is designed to foster. Delegations of “sans papiers” collectives came from Nantes, Lille, Alençon and Rouen.

Several local groups of the Education Without Frontiers Network (RESF) were present. The organisation sprang up at the beginning of the school year when, under already existing legislation, immigrant pupils started to be removed from schools because their families were being expelled. This was in line with Sarkozy’s stated aim to deport 25,000 “illegal” immigrants in 2006.

Defense movements of pupils, teachers and parents developed to keep the children in school, and their parents in France. Sarkozy was obliged last autumn, in the midst of the urban youth riots, to issue instructions to the préfets (police chiefs) to leave the children and their families alone until the end of this school year, June 30.

It is believed that once the summer holidays begin, the authorities will proceed to deport over 10,000 immigrant pupils and their families. The RESF launched a campaign on April 27, supported by some prominent personalities, for the harbouring of children and their families due for expulsion—an offence punishable by five years’ imprisonment and a 30,000 euro fine.

A substantial group of students came from Nanterre University, on the outskirts of Paris. They told the *World Socialist Web Site* that they saw their mobilisation as a continuation of the three-month anti-CPE (First Job Contract) struggle against social and job insecurity, and hoped that the immigration law would also be withdrawn as a result of pressure from the streets.

Many of the provisions of Sarkozy’s law are designed to stigmatise immigrants and to create a constant climate of harassment and intimidation in order to make them a more cowed and exploitable work force.

One key measure, which would overturn the automatic right to legal residence after ten years of living in France, is estimated to affect only 3,000-4,000 immigrants. However, another provision, which abolishes the automatic renewal of ten-year residence permits, instead leaving this up to the whim of the local préfet, places a question mark over the future of many long-established legal immigrants.

Another measure, which extends the period of residence in

France from one year to 18 months before immigrants can apply for members of their family to join them, is gratuitous harassment. A related stipulation that their home be of a certain size and their resources be adequate, independent of welfare benefits, will deprive many of the right to live legally with their families.

Only after three years of marriage, rather than the present two, will a French person's spouse have the right to apply for a ten-year residence permit. The period of marriage necessary to acquire French nationality is doubled to four years. These rights are subject to proof of living as man and wife.

The parties of the Plural Left—the Communist Party, and particularly the Socialist Party, with the aid of the LCR and LO—have been increasingly promoting protest movements on single issues in order to appear as an alternative to the authoritarian, socially regressive Gaullist government. They hope to acquire a progressive profile in preparation for the 2007 elections, while preventing any discussion of their record in defence of national and European big business at the expense of the rights and living standards of the working class.

A glance at the immigration policy of official left governments in France since 1981 reveals a long record of state repression. The conservative government of President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and Prime Minister Raymond Barre enacted the highly repressive “Bonnet Law” in 1980. When the Socialist Party took office in alliance with the Communist Party, with the SP's François Mitterrand as president, the “left” government enacted a 1981 law retaining the offence of irregular residence and giving judges the power to impose forcible expulsion.

A document produced by the Group for Information and Support for Immigrants, titled “Guide for Entry and Residence,” points out that “the left in 1981 kept in force two of the most contested measures in Bonnet's Law: forced expulsions and especially the imprisonment of foreign nationals pending forcible expulsion ...”

The “Joxe Law” of 1989, under the Socialist Party government of Michel Rocard, famous for his outburst that France could not accommodate “toute la misère du monde” (all the wretched of the earth), softened many of the extreme measures of the Pasqua law of 1986 “but did not prevent arbitrary administrative procedures from developing” and the victimisation of students, foreign spouses and asylum seekers.

The Socialist Party government of Edith Cresson greatly tightened immigration controls: imposing fines on air lines bringing in undocumented immigrants, increasing penalties for employers of illegal workers, depriving asylum seekers of work permits, and creating retention centres at ports and

airports where immigrants could be held for 20 days. The conservative government that came to power after the defeat of the left in 1993 placed Charles Pasqua in the post of minister of the interior. He built on Cresson and Rocard's contributions.

When, in the run-up to the 1997 parliamentary elections, a movement led by film-makers called for civil disobedience against a law obliging the hosts of an immigrant to provide the police with information on their friend's movements, Socialist Party leader Lionel Jospin, the soon-to-be prime minister of the Plural Left government, declared that as a citizen he would have to inform the police.

When his government took office in 1997 it refused to regularise the thousands of immigrants rendered illegal by the former government's policies.

If this were not enough to prove that another Socialist and Communist party government would continue to repress immigrants, the emergence of a 2005 Socialist Party draft policy document on immigration is conclusive. It is entitled “A New Immigration Policy” and was drawn up for discussion by Malek Boutih, the Socialist Party's national secretary for social issues and former leader of the anti-racist organisation SOS Racisme.

It proposes a system of quotas for immigration from different countries, denies the automatic uniting of families, and places strong emphasis on state control and supervision of requests for residence rights. Attacking the right wing for failing to control immigration effectively, Boutih says: “We propose to establish a policy of quotas for immigration flows, making it possible to anticipate the needs and capabilities of our society. These quotas will be drawn up on the basis of the number of immigrants which France will take in each year and will involve the countries which have historical, political and economic links with France...” The document has not been repudiated by the Socialist Party leadership, which has attempted to keep it from public scrutiny.



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