

# France: Day of action highlights chasm between workers and established parties

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29 May 2010

The May 27 day of action in France was a political fraud perpetrated on workers and youth participating in the demonstration, by France's main trade unions and the bourgeois left parties: the *Parti Socialiste* (PS), the *Parti Communiste Français* (PCF), the Left Party (*Parti de Gauche*, PG) and the *Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste* (NPA) of Olivier Besancenot.

The demonstration was called to appeal to workers' legitimate and rising opposition to cuts planned by conservative President Nicolas Sarkozy in pensions, jobs and living standards. These cuts are in line with the draconian austerity policies imposed throughout Europe. The clearest example is the austerity program enacted by Greek social-democratic Prime Minister Giorgios Papandreou, in exchange for a €110 billion European Union-International Monetary Fund bailout.

The day of action aimed to lull workers to sleep by suggesting that they can rely on the existing parties to oppose Sarkozy's policies, instead of their own independent revolutionary struggle against the social-democrats and their "left" appendages. It is part of a long series of impotent, spaced-out protests organised by the unions. They act as escape valves for social anger, allowing the government to gauge how and in what doses it will administer its austerity measures, and hiding the existing "left" parties' support for the cuts.

France's pension cuts are part of measures required by the European Commission to reduce its budget deficit of 8 percent of the gross national product to 3 percent by 2013, involving €100 billion in budget cuts. Sarkozy aims to raise the pension age from 60 to 63.

The PS's First Secretary Martine Aubry stated her agreement with Sarkozy's pension cuts last January, asserting that the retirement age needed to be raised by two or three years and that the PS was prepared to work with the government to reduce the budget deficit and

public debt. Though Aubry subsequently was forced to withdraw her support for increasing the retirement age, the PS still endorses the €100 billion budget cuts.

Other sections of the social-democrats make no pretense of opposing Sarkozy's cuts. The IMF director general and prominent PS leader Dominique Strauss-Kahn, Minister of the Economy and Finance in the Plural Left government (1997 – 2002) of PS prime minister Lionel Jospin, supports Sarkozy's position. "We are not going to go on having retirement at 60," he declared, saying that there should be no "taboo" on the issue.

*Le Monde*, France's paper of record, echoed Strauss-Kahn in its May 27 editorial: "Dogma, taboo! Retirement at 60...comes into collision with reality."

The NPA is fully complicit with the May 27 organizers. In a May 14 statement reporting a meeting held May 6, the party declared: "[T]he first unitary meeting bringing together personalities of the social, trade union and political left was a real success." Listing the unions, student unions, the Greens, the PCF, the PS, the PG, and the NPA, it continued, "Everyone was present in order to commit themselves to a real united political and social campaign until victory."

Speaking to *Le Monde*, Besancenot tried to sow the crudest lies about the PS: "The Socialist Party has finally decided, it is for the defense of retirement at 60. ... We need the broadest possible front and, for that, the PS must take part in united mobilizations."

Between 400,000 (according to police) and 1 million (according to union sources) marchers participated in the demonstrations. Government figures for strikers in the public sector were 11.6 percent in the civil service, 7.5 percent in local government, 8.3 percent in hospitals, 12.8 percent in the postal service, between 12 and 16 percent in education, and nearly 30 percent on

the railways. This suggests that close to a million public sector workers were on strike, similar to the last day of action on March 23.

In Marseille, WSWS reporters spoke to demonstrators. A woman said: “Today’s demonstration won’t do it. I’m for a new revolution. This government is like the monarchy. We’re in the same situation as Greece. The banks dictate austerity measures to the governments and the first to pay are the youth, they’re being massacred, they’ve got no perspectives. In my time you had a job at 16. They couldn’t give a damn about us or whether we go hungry. It’s all down to them. We put up with too much. ... We’re back to the situation in 1789, with the king and the people starving to death.”

In Nice 9,000 people marched. There were teachers, firefighters, hospital workers and other public and private sector workers, as well as university and high school students. They were aware that the attacks on their pensions and the social services are part of a Europe-wide austerity programme imposed by the governments at the behest of the banks. “In coming days, France will face same things as Greece,” marchers commented.

When reminded of European Central Bank president Jean-Claude Trichet’s assessment that the current world political and economic situation was comparable to 1939-1945, several agreed. “We cannot tolerate this situation any more. We need a mass organisation to defend us. We need to unite at a European level.”

One said: “I agree with the idea of a workers’ government but I don’t know how it would work.” After reading the leaflet of the WSWS article, “The specter of catastrophe returns”, she said, “We need a party like that, independent of the unions and the old left parties. I’ll show this to my friends.”

Jonathan, a history masters student at Amiens university approached WSWS reporters and said he had read WSWS leaflets before at the university campus. He said, “The unions and the political parties are hiding the depth of the crisis. They want to calm things down and avoid the rage of the masses. Even Obama has yielded to the bankers. It is they who decide what governments do.”

He explained that he is a teaching assistant in a high school: “You are aware that there’s a lack of means, of equipment. The buildings are becoming dilapidated.

It’s going the same way as education in the US.”

He continued, “I think that the PS would do the same in France as Papandreou is doing in Greece. The PS elite are bourgeois. Aubry spends her time in business circles trying to get their support. The NPA tries to appeal to a wider audience and seems to be abandoning its principles. ... The working class should take over the banks and big business and run them themselves. They need to be given these ideas, and what they can achieve with them. We are heading for an explosion.”



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