

# Strikes continue in France against pension cuts

**Alex Lantier****25 October 2010**

Workers and students continued to mount strike action over the weekend against President Nicolas Sarkozy's pension cuts in the face of anti-strike injunctions issued by national and regional authorities. The government was particularly concerned about the risk of oil and gasoline shortages today, the first day of the All Saints Week holiday.

France's 12 refineries were still officially on strike, though at least three—Fos, Donges and Grandpuits—have been raided by police, who forced workers to suspend their occupations and pump oil to resupply gas stations. Nevertheless, strikes and blockades of oil depots continued, with the Donges and Feyzin refineries voting to stay on strike all week.

The attorney for Donges workers filed a suit yesterday to block further requisitions of oil at the refinery. Dmitri Guiller, an official of the Donges branch of the French and Democratic Labor Federation (CFDT), told *Libération* that "all of the refinery's personnel" had been requisitioned.

Also at Donges, 100 strikers and protestors blockaded four tugs in port, preventing them from hauling in an oil tanker so it could unload its supplies.

While the government had announced late last week that only one in five of France's gas stations was out of fuel, Sarkozy's counselor for social affairs, Raymond Soubie, told Europe1 Sunday that "overall, one gas station out of four does not have supplies." However, he said that only 5 stations of the 350 on France's main highways would be out of fuel.

Jean-François Roubaud, president of the General Confederation of Small and Mid-Sized Enterprises (CPGME), denounced the oil strikes as "economic terrorism."

The office of the police chief in the Bouches-du-Rhône department near Marseille issued an injunction

to force striking garbage workers back to work. It declared: "Notifications of requisition are being issued for agents of the centers of Aygalades and la Capelette. This will take effect from Monday October 25 to Saturday October 30."

Since October 11, public-sector garbage workers have been "on total strike until the pension cuts are withdrawn," according to the local Force Ouvrière (Workers' Power) union branch. On Wednesday, 150 members of the military's Civil Security unit from Brignoles were ordered to collect garbage in Marseille, concentrating on commercial areas in the city center.

Strikes are continuing also on the railways. The government is claiming that 8 in 10 high-speed trains and roughly half of Paris-area suburban train traffic will be guaranteed.

Students at universities and high schools told the press they would try to continue mobilizations during the holiday, or, in the case of certain universities that do not have a break, increase their activity to underline continuing popular opposition to the government. University Paris-10 at Nanterre voted a blockade of literature and humanities buildings at a general assembly meeting attended by 650 students.

Officials of the National Union of French University Students (UNEF), the National Union of High School Students (UNL), and the Independent and Democratic Federation of High School Students (FIDL) noted that holidays had not halted youth protests in 2006 against the First Job Contract (CPE). They have called for a national youth demonstration tomorrow.

The continuing mobilizations are taking place despite a lack of support from the national trade union leaderships, who have postponed all broader strike action until October 28—the day after a reconciled version of the Senate and National Assembly pension

bills is officially adopted by a parity commission. With this decision, the unions are signaling that they will mount no industrial action to defend workers targeted by state strike-breaking. Instead, they are moving to wind down the mass movement.

In this, they have been supported by France's so-called "left" parties. French Communist Party (PCF) First Secretary Pierre Laurent told *Le Monde*, "We should not be complaining. The trade unions did an excellent job in a very tense situation. We have to be confident in them and give it our all."

*Le Monde* also noted that the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA) of Olivier Besancenot had scaled back its rhetoric. It wrote: "Compared to the beginning of October, Olivier Besancenot has put away his criticisms of unions, which he described as a bit weak, and his calls for a 'new May 1968.'"

Relying on the capitulation of the unions and "left" parties, the government is trying to present opposition as a lost cause. In an article entitled "Pensions—towards the end of the battle," the *Journal du Dimanche* quoted Soubie as saying the law would take effect "on November 15." The *Journal* added that, according to Soubie, the government would present the law for constitutional verification at the Constitutional Council "to quiet down national protests."

Polls continue to show overwhelming support for the strikes. An Ifop poll for *Dimanche Ouest-France* showed 63 percent of the population supporting strike action against Sarkozys' cuts, down somewhat from previous highs of 71 percent. Sarkozy's approval rating fell to a new low of 29 percent, however.

By continuing the struggle against Sarkozy's cuts, workers and students are engaging in a political struggle against the government. This underscores the significance of the *World Socialist Web Site*'s call for workers to form their own independent committees of action, to defend and extend the strikes and prepare for a general strike to bring down the Sarkozy government and replace it with a workers' government.

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