Workers and youth speak out against French labour law reform

Our reporters
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The WSWS spoke to students and workers participating in demonstrations throughout France against proposed changes to the country's labour law Thursday. The law, named after Labour Minister Myriam El Khomri, would lay the groundwork for slashing holiday pay, rest breaks, and other workplace protections.

A student in Marseille denounced the consequences the measure would have: "The law upsets us, because it makes mass sackings easier. It gives all sorts of advantages to management and few to the workers. Already the bosses have more rights, so if we give them even more, there will be no fun at all in going to work. I am getting a technical degree so I can get a job faster, but it's losing its advantages … What's the point of studying if afterwards you are just badly paid?"

He warned, "If they keep taking things away from us, there will be a civil war, just like people are starting to talk about. If it continues in the next few years, it will happen."

In another protest in Marseille, William, a high school student, said he opposed "above all the retrogression in working conditions. I wanted to make a sign saying, '100 years ago we were cannon fodder [in World War I], now we're profit fodder'."

William criticised the state of emergency and the surveillance and police laws imposed by successive governments in France: "It's inappropriate, the president can have anyone spied on. I think using terrorism as a pretext for the state of emergency is not justified. Even if we went in and took away ISIS's territory, there would still be people to carry out terror bombings."

At Amiens, Valeo workers, high school students, and university students protested together against the labour law reform.

A student from Eduard Gant high school said that he did not believe the ruling Socialist Party's (PS) promises that the reform will also benefit workers: "If the bosses become more competitive and make more profits, they will only keep them for themselves. Hollande just defends the bosses."

In Paris, the WSWS spoke to a job seeker who had decided to march in a protest against the El Khomri Law.

Asked about his opinion of the unions, he said, "The problem is that the traditional unions are just with the bosses, they represent nothing today. They live for one purpose and one purpose alone: to get the maximum amount of subsidies from the state or business so their bureaucracy can survive, and they do not represent what they should, that is to say, to defend salaried and wage workers. There are many unions that no longer represent anyone at all."

He spoke out strongly against the PS. He said, "It betrayed the workers, that is all it has done since the 1980s. But now they are taking it to a whole new level. They were middle-of-the-road in the 1980s, but now they've gone over frankly to the right or even the far right with anti-democratic laws. So they represent nothing as I see it, they don't exist anymore. I think they have just shot themselves in the foot. And they are trying to attract right-wing voters, but that won't work. We need a new, real social movement that is independent of the PS."

He also insisted that, in a globalised economy, it is impossible to struggle for workers' social rights just within the national context of France.

He said, "We cannot try to take care of workers just in France and ignore the conditions of workers abroad. Today, the working conditions they are trying to impose on us, they exist across much of the world, or

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even sometimes the working conditions elsewhere are much worse. The fact that it is outside of our borders does not make it any better.”

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