

# Workers and youth in Amiens speak out against French labour reform

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A protest called by trade, high school, and university student unions against the Socialist Party's (PS) labour law reform brought together some 500 demonstrators in the northern French city of Amiens. The banners and flags of the Stalinist General Confederation of Labour (CGT) and FO (Workers Force) were prominent, and youth fewer than in previous demonstrations.

The demonstration was politically dominated by the satirical magazine *Fakir*, based in Amiens, whose editor Francis Ruffin launched the petty-bourgeois *Nuit Debout* movement occupying République Square in Paris, which has spread to several French towns. *Fakir* and Ruffin have long played a central role in the social movement in Amiens, supporting various pseudo-left allies of the PS, including the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF).

The gathering received lavishly-printed free copies of a four-page *Fakir* supplement and leaflets calling for a meeting of Amiens' *Nuit Debout* after the demonstration. The CGT offered their mic to supporters of *Nuit Debout* to advertise the meeting. The leaflet proposed no policy to defeat the El Khomri law and claimed that the principles of the movement are that "Politics must not be for professionals but for everyone." This obscures the fact that the professional operator Ruffin and his team work closely with the PS' political satellites.

The free *Fakir* issue's statement on *Nuit Debout* proclaims that "Nuit Debout is not a party and so does not have a programme." It supports the coming together of the *Nuit Debout* movement with the very trade unions which have supported the PS government's reactionary attacks on the Labour Code. It says this would be "the junction of classes, a union of proles and intellectuals."

Nonetheless, *Fakir* does not hide its pro-PS

sympathies. It praises the election of the first PS president, François Mitterrand, in 1981 by "bearded teachers, Socialists and workers" without mentioning the PS' turn to austerity. It finishes with a long interview with the demographer and political commentator Emmanuel Todd calling for economic protectionism.

A WSWs team distributed the statement "The working class in France mobilizes against austerity" and spoke to several youth. They were unanimous in thinking that the series of spaced out days of action called by the unions and the pseudo-left did not represent a serious attempt to counter PS austerity and attacks on the protective laws of the Labour Code. They all saw the struggle against austerity in France as part of an international war against the working class and agreed that it needed to be opposed on an international basis.

Zoé, in her second year at Michélin High School, specialising in literature and languages, said: "The unions may be trying to do something, but it's not enough. I can't say why, but if the El Khomri law is not withdrawn, the youth have no future. It can't be done with the PS government. It must be an international fight."

Thomas, studying building trades at the vocational Acheuléen High School had come to the demonstration with a classmate and with Salomé, a first year student at Thuilleries High School.

Though he could not say why the unions were not carrying out a real fight, he said his fellow students were all worried about their future. "The state of emergency represses the right to protest, it's against the workers and youth—it's no good."

Salomé expressed disgust for the government and various parties claiming to be on the "left" who had

supported the election of PS President François Hollande. Hearing of Jean-Luc Mélenchon's plan to form a "national guard" to help the army, she exclaimed: "And that's supposed to be the left in France!"

She said, "The government has used the terrorist attacks and the state of emergency to attack our rights and our right to defend ourselves. The deprivation of nationality is designed to divide us. I agree, it's like a return to Vichy France and the Algerian War. I'm not in a union, but I know they are not working for us. My brother is a trade unionist. He tells me that they're going to make us pay for emergency treatment in the hospitals. Next it'll be education and we'll be a people with nothing."

"The economic crisis is international—I agree with your programme of uniting workers across the world," she added.



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