

Protests erupt in France against regressive labor law

Alex Lantier
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After the Socialist Party (PS) government of Prime Minister Manuel Valls announced Tuesday that he would impose the unpopular labour law reform without a vote in the National Assembly, protests and riots erupted in cities across France against the PS's blatantly anti-democratic procedure.

Valls and President François Hollande invoked article 49-3 of the French constitution, which allows them to impose a law if the Assembly does not vote to censure the government, forcing new elections, in 48 hours—that is, by the end of today. Three-quarters of the population opposes the draft law, which lengthens working times, undermines job security and allows bosses and unions to negotiate contracts violating the Labour Code.

Hundreds of protesters gathered Tuesday night in Paris in front of the National Assembly, whose staff barricaded the shutters, fearing a riot. Protesters denounced Valls' decision as an “insult to the people,” shouting slogans such as, “Real democracy is here” and “National Assembly, assembly of capital.”

One thousand people marched across Toulouse shouting, “Toulouse, rise up,” and, “We don't want this society,” but were blocked by a police cordon before they could arrive at the departmental PS headquarters. Protests of several hundred people also took place in Lille, Tours, Marseille, Grenoble and Nantes, where protesters clashed violently with police.

In Lyon, protesters shouted slogans against the PS in front of city hall, and later attacked a police station and ransacked a PS local section building. Another PS headquarters was violently ransacked by a few dozen protesters in Caen.

The PS government and the French bourgeoisie are hoping, however, that while these protests reflect anger felt by tens of millions of workers, they will not immediately provoke the eruption of a general strike by

the working class, as in 1936 or 1968.

The daily newspaper *Le Monde* wrote, “Even though using article 49-3 immediately provoked a protest before the National Assembly, the government is betting that its parliamentary coup will not inflame the social climate. ‘The social movement and protests exist, but they are not currently growing,’ commented an associate of the head of state.”

The events in France starkly highlight the significance of the deep crisis of political leadership in the working class. Workers and youth mounted mass protests against the law for over two months, it is overwhelmingly opposed by the population, and the general mood among workers in France and internationally is moving to the left, amid rising social anger with the entire political establishment. Yet a desperately weak and unpopular PS government, which is widely seen as a factotum for the banks, is on the verge of imposing a widely hated law by legislative fiat.

Central responsibility for this lies with the union bureaucracy and the pseudo-left parties close to the PS, like the New Anticapitalist Party, that mounted the #UpAllNight movement, which directed youth away from struggle against the PS and towards impotent meetings on various city squares. This demobilised the protests, blocked a campaign to mobilise broader layers of the working class against the Valls government, and handed the initiative for a time back to the PS. The PS then wasted no time in moving to ram the bill through the Assembly.

There will be powerful anger and opposition in the working class to attempts to use the labour law to undermine its wages and conditions, particularly given the antidemocratic methods the PS used to impose the law. The struggle of the working class against the PS

and against similar governments across Europe is only beginning.

Yet it must be stated clearly that the PS is on the verge of succeeding in forcing the bill through the parliament. Unlike the #UpAllNight movement—whose media figurehead, nationalist economist Frédéric Lordon, has insisted that it does not matter whether or not the labour reform passes—the WSWs frankly warns that the labour law would be used to mount bitter attacks on working people.

Its passage would mark a significant setback for the workers and youth who have been fighting the bill, and constitute irrefutable proof of the necessity of a break with the existing organisations, which are tied to the PS and have proven completely bankrupt.

This includes the attempts by sections of the trade union bureaucracy and of the Left Front of Jean-Luc Mélenchon to promote illusions in impotent appeals to deputies of the National Assembly to halt or partially rewrite the labour reform.

Thus Mélenchon posted a Tweet on the labour law apparently calling for joint protests with right-wing forces and a motion of censure to bring down the PS government. He wrote, “To stop it, vote to censure. No reticence on disgusting measures faced with disgusting people. Yes, we need protests by a common front of those who refuse the bill. And now.”

A motion of censure presented by the Left Front and its allies failed last night, receiving less than 60 votes. Today, a motion of censure is being prepared by the right-wing opposition The Republicans (LR) party, though it appears unlikely to carry under conditions where fewer than 60 deputies from the Left Front and PS were willing to vote to censure the government.

Every indication is that the so-called rebel factions of the PS that have voiced mild and hypocritical objections to the labour reform are preparing to fall in line with the law and will not vote to censure the PS government.

Benoît Hamon, one of the leaders of the faction, said yesterday, “The right-wing censure motion, well, you have to understand that you may be in disagreement with Manuel Valls, but preferring [right-wing former President] Nicolas Sarkozy to Manuel Valls ... it's a bit hard to prefer that type of politics to the current government.”

The Valls government is reportedly threatening any

PS deputy who votes the LR censure motion in the Assembly with expulsion from the PS.



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