

Defying police repression, protests continue against French labour law

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18 May 2016

Despite the imposition of the reactionary labour law by the Socialist Party (PS) government in the National Assembly last week, using emergency clause 49.3 of the French constitution, protests against the law are continuing this week across France.

During yesterday's strikes and demonstrations, truck drivers blocked or slowed traffic to a crawl on motorways near big cities in most regions of France. Tomorrow, there will be a strike on French railways, while a new round of demonstrations and strikes against the labour law is planned for Thursday.

Protesters are defying brutal police repression of demonstrations against the labour law and the broader police state agenda of the PS. In a sinister development, trampling fundamental democratic principles including freedom of assembly and the presumption of innocence, the PS has been launching pre-emptive arrests of protesters to stop them from participating in protests. The PS used the current State of Emergency, voted in after the November 13th terrorist attacks in Paris, as a pretext for this blatant attack on democratic rights.

The PS's claim was rejected yesterday by the administrative courts, which rule on state institutions, who heard appeals from activists who had been banned from the demonstrations. In nine out of ten cases, the bans were overturned. Nonetheless, the government's invocation of such authoritarian powers is a serious warning to workers and youth: the PS and the entire ruling class have moved very far in the direction of police state rule, as it seeks to impose their agenda of social retrogression.

During yesterday's demonstrations, police and demonstrators clashed again amid the growing anger of youth and workers with the PS. A total of 87 people were arrested nationwide. The demonstration in Paris, which was to have marched to Prime Minister Manuel

Valls's offices at Matignon Palace, was rerouted with the trade unions' agreement in order to protect the government.

In Paris, 55,000 demonstrated according to the trade unions, while police claimed the demonstration was only 13,000 strong. Clashes between police and protesters erupted towards the end of the march, as in Marseille, where the youth marchers became separated from trade union protesters and were attacked by police. Students at the Marseille protest also charged that the Stalinist General Confederation of Labour (CGT) union had helped the police attack them at the last protest, firing tear gas at the youth protesters.

Other major cities reported sizeable demonstrations: in Marseille, 6,800 according to police or 80,000 according to the trade unions; Lyon, 1,700 (police) or 7,000 (unions); Toulouse, 2,300 or 8,000; Nantes, 3,500 or 10,000; Grenoble: 1,600 or 7,000; Rennes, 1,100 or 2,000 protesters.

In Rennes, a section of the demonstration tried to join truck drivers blocking the ring road around the town and were pursued by police. About 450 managed to join the truck drivers, shouting, "State of Emergency, Police State, no one will stop us joining the truck drivers."

In Nantes, hundreds of youth took control of the front of the demonstration, clashing with police and throwing projectiles at the outside of the Prefecture. The banner at the head of the youth rally was "Resistances." They chanted, "We aren't violent, we are angry, young, precarious and revolutionary" and "What we want is to attack the state, we don't want any more 49.3". The police intervened twice with tear gas against the youth.

These protests reflect deeply rooted opposition to the PS's assault on social gains won over decades of social struggle by the working class in the 20th century. Mass

opposition to the labour law and growing anger among workers and youth are creating a crisis of rule for the PS government.

Since it came to power in 2012, President François Hollande's PS has made so many attacks on the social and democratic rights of the population that Hollande is the most hated French president of the entire postwar period, with an approval rating of just 14 percent. The El Khomri law is opposed by 75 percent of the population. After the PS government rammed it through the parliament, 54 percent of the population still support continuing protests against it; 68 percent want the government to not implement the law in its current form.

There is every indication, both in France and in escalating struggles of the working class across Europe and internationally, that this escalating discontent is moving in the direction of a social explosion and a direct political confrontation between the working class and the bourgeois state. It is urgent under these conditions for definite political lessons to be drawn from the experience of the protests so far.

In the absence of a broad mobilisation of the working class in struggle against the PS government and the European Union, it is impossible to effectively oppose the austerity drive. As in other countries across Europe, the PS government in France and its trade union and political allies will seek to divide, defuse and demobilise popular opposition as much as possible, so that the ruling class can continue with the imposition of the law.

The struggle of the working class in France against the labour law, and more broadly against austerity across Europe, requires a political struggle against war and to defend democratic rights. Last year, it emerged that Hollande maintains a secret international kill list, discussed only with a handful of unanswerable high-ranking intelligence and military officials. Now, the outlines of a military-police dictatorship in France carrying out preventive arrests and other police provocations to illegalise protests are emerging into view.

The only way forward is to take the struggle out of the hands of the trade and student unions, and to carry out a ruthless political break with the PS, the trade unions, and their pseudo-left supporters, which have proven utterly bankrupt and hostile to the interests of

the working class. Any movement left in their hands is condemned to stagnation, dismemberment and, ultimately, to defeat. Workers need organisations of struggle independent of the trade unions and existing parties, based on a perspective of a revolutionary struggle.



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