

Courts persecute opponents of French labour law in Amiens

Antoine Lerougetel
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Two protesters against the French government's labour law, university student Manon Chelmy, 22, and high school student Jules, 18, both from Amiens, were tried on June 10 and then sentenced to 90 hours of community service after a protest at Amiens town hall.

The public prosecutor had called for harsh five-year prison sentences for the two youth. This attempt failed, but they were not acquitted of the charges of "wilful damage to public property" and "wilful violence against persons in a position of public authority."

The judgment, as well as the sentence demanded by the public prosecutor, are part of a vast repressive offensive carried out by the Socialist Party (PS), to try to intimidate mass opposition among youth and workers to Labour Minister Myriam El Khomri's law. Three quarters of the population oppose the law. In desperation, the PS wants to terrorise anyone trying to build a movement against its policies or attempting to defend themselves against the CRS riot police by threatening them with harsh sentences in the courts.

Manon and Jules took part in a peaceful occupation of the council chamber in the Amiens town hall where over 100 opponents of the labour law held a debate for four hours. The authorities sent in a large contingent of CRS who cleared the chamber, using batons. Manon and Jules tried to defend themselves from the CRS assault by throwing desk microphones at them. There was not the slightest injury caused to the riot police. (See video)

On May 11, Manon and Jules were identified at another demonstration and were detained for 24 hours.

From the beginning of March, when the mass student protests against the El Khomri law gathered pace, members of the domestic intelligence services (RG) had told Manon that she was beginning to get known "because she was very active at the start of the

movement."

The police conducted searches at Manon's and Jules' homes. They paid special attention to political material they found, and took photos of their books. Manon is a member of the Stalinist youth organisation, the Young Communists (JC). Jules described himself at the trial as not belonging to any organisation but as "a citizen who fights for his ideas. I've been on many demos and occupations. I've never got into a fight with the CRS."

At the trial, Manon said in her defence, "I tried to defend my comrades who were being subjected to police violence. They were armed and we were unarmed. They tear gassed the chamber. ... Nobody wanted three of us to end up in hospital."

Her lawyer stressed that "gas was sprayed and beating with batons carried out before any microphones were thrown." He added: "If we allow this, it means that the police can beat people with impunity."

In her summing-up, the public prosecutor insisted on qualifying the occupation as "a mob and not a demonstration," so as to circumvent the constitutional right to demonstrate. "They're like people who stay in the rain and are then surprised that they've got wet," she added. "The CRS did their job after the two warnings. There was no alternative to using their batons because they refused to go."

Well documented political and historical differences separate the WSWS and Trotskyism from the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF) and the JC. However, the WSWS opposes repression of these youth and a trumped-up legal procedure designed to terrorise mass opposition to the hated austerity policies of the government.

Jules and Manon were not acquitted. They will have to face a civil trial in October and risk having to compensate the town hall for the damage caused by the

CRS' brutal intervention.

The qualitative development of the PS' intensified police and judicial offensive against the working class began with the imposition of the state of emergency by President François Hollande after the November 13, 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris and will be prolonged at least until the end of July.

These events fully justify the WSWs' analysis, which stressed that the imposition of the state of emergency was not principally directed against the Islamist terrorist networks—which serve NATO's foreign policy in Syria in any case—but rather against popular opposition in France. The aim is to impose police state conditions.

Indeed, the government immediately used it during the Paris Climate Conference in November-December 2015 to carry out hundreds of house searches and house arrests against people who had no criminal record. It did so again in May and June this year against protests against the El Khomri law, placing dozens of people under house arrest and banning them from participating in demonstrations.

Thus, in Nantes, according to FSU teacher union sources, 18 people have been banned from demonstrations “until the end of the state of emergency.”

In January this year, eight trade unionists who had been fighting the closure of the Goodyear tyre factory in Amiens in 2014, were condemned to nine months in prison for having “boss-napped” two management officials of the company for 30 hours without mistreating them. This is a familiar tactic in France during industrial disputes.



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