

France: An explosive situation - Towards a general strike

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The political situation in France is dominated by the mobilization against the proposed reform of the pension system. This reform is at the heart of Sarkozy's austerity policy. Although it is presented as an obvious demographic necessity, it is meeting increasing opposition in public opinion.

The mobilization has been growing since the start of the mobilizations in May and the first day of action in June. Since the beginning of September three days of strikes and demonstrations (the 7th and 23rd of September and the 2nd of October) have brought out 3 million people on each occasion. The CGT estimates that 5 million people have participated in the strikes and demonstrations since the start.

On each day of action, we have seen that there are more private sector workers, more young people - even high school students are beginning to mobilise and block their schools - and more radical demands.

Popular rejection of Sarkozy's policies

The battle against the draft law on pensions also shows a massive rejection of the whole politics of Sarkozy. There is not only the question of the pension, numerous sectors are extremely mobilized, on strike on various topics: post offices, in hospitals, the nurse-anaesthetists, the dockers...

Faced with this resistance, the government is more and more unpopular. These accumulated difficulties are provoking a crisis within the right.

To try to reassert his control, Sarkozy has stressed his racist and security policies, in relation to the Roms in particular. But also in the last few weeks, the government has tried to make people forget the social question by advancing the terrorist danger. But without much success.

Dissatisfaction is growing and the situation is "explosive". Faced with the success of the demonstrations and strike days, the government has not moved and says that nothing will be changed in its proposal. The crisis and the debt are poor excuses to justify the reform.

Sarkozy and his government want their reform. Faced with the determination of the government, many workers know that to win it's necessary to impose social determination.

Today, in numerous sectors, it is time for an all-out strike. For example in the RATP (Paris public transport system), the SNCF (French national railway company), but also in the chemical and engineering industries there is a possibility of a continuing strike from Tuesday. [[1](#)]

We know that the next day of strikes and demonstrations, on Tuesday 12th October, will be a success. And today, the idea that we can win is increasing.

The state of the movement

- It is, at the moment, a very political movement. The strike rates are strong but not exceptional. The self-organization of the movement today, is very low. General assemblies in the various sectors are have very low participation.

- It is a unitarian movement. There is an inter-union coordinating committee [2], which gives the calendar of mobilisations but which is pushed by the intransigence of the government and by the very radical militant teams.

This movement is characterized by a massive refusal of the reform, a spectacular mistrust against the power, against Sarkozy but we don't know what will be the end result of this confrontation. Everything is possible.

On the political level

The NPA participates with the whole French left including the PS but without LO, in a unitarian campaign against the pensions reform .

This unitarian campaign, launched by Attac and the Copernic Foundation, is based on the demand of a pension at 60 years for all and the withdrawal of the law.

Although all the left agrees on these two demands, there are several diusagreements.

The disagreement over demands is in particular with the Socialist Party. They agree with the demands of 60 years old as retirement age but they defend the idea that workers must work longer to get a full pension. And so they voted with right deputies for the increase of years worked to qualify for the full pension.

There are also disagreements about the strategy for winning against the government and obtaining the withdrawal of the draft law. There are disagreements with the Socialist Party but also with the Communist Party and Parti de gauche (Left Party). The Socialist Party ask us to wait for the next presidential elections in 2012 and the other political forces demand a referendum, turning the class struggle into an institutional question. They are all refusing the social confrontation necessary to win.

The NPA's profile

Since the beginning of the mobilization, the NPA has worked in two directions:

- The first : to be completely in the unitarian campaign, defending retirement at 60 years old with full pension .We also demand the withdrawal of the law. Olivier is the party spokesperson who has participated at the most unitarian meetings around the country.

- For us, the main demand is the redistribution of wealth and the sharing of work. Our profile is clear, since last May we have been working for a massive social ant political confrontation.

As the government is very unpopular, one of our demands is to sack Woerth, the labour minister, and president Sarkozy.

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P.S.

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Footnotes

[1] The right to strike is embodied in the French constitution. Trades unions have to give a “warning” (préavis) of a strike for the workers to be considered legally on strike. In these sectors there has been a préavis for a “reconductible” or all-out strike, that is one that is revoted each day by the workers.

[2] The “intersyndical” brings together the five confederations, including two usually classed on the “right”, CGT, CFDT, FO, CGC and CFTC; the radical union SUD Solidaires with important implantation in the postal, transport and health sectors, FSU and UNSA (teachers and public sector)