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France

Strong resistance to Sarkozy's agenda

- IV Online magazine - 2007 - IV394 - November 2007 -

Publication date: Monday 26 November 2007

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Sarkozy's election in May 2007 was a serious political defeat. But the recently elected president, hand in hand with the bosses' union, had yet to inflict a major social defeat to the working class.

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It was uncertain whether the team in power would try to go as fast as possible in inflicting that defeat, or if it would choose to buy time only concentrating on some specific categories hoping they would not be supported by the population (railway workers, students ...). With the economic crisis imported from the United States, the uncertainty was over: it would have to be everything at the same time, especially as the government had started off by giving billions of euros to the richest among the rich and had nothing much left to deal with the situation.

Apart from the ruling classes, literally everyone is under attack. A few examples: on the pensions issue, workers are supposed to work longer to get less in the end, sick people will have to pay a "*franchise*" (fixed rate fee) to be allowed access to social security, immigrants are submitted to more restrictive laws, the possibility of DNA testing of immigrants to prove family relationships was voted in Parliament, illegal immigrants' children are threatened, the right to study is put in jeopardy both by the loss of thousands of teacher jobs and the autonomization of universities, preparing the competition between them...

But the government is facing two major problems. First it is quite risky to carry out all the attacks at the same time. Second, Sarkozy was elected not only because of the absolute lack of alternative on the side of the Socialist Party but also on a fairytale: he would increase buying power. And buying power is not increasing.

The [Ligue communiste révolutionnaire](#) had said from the beginning that there would be some resistance to [Sarkozy's](#) attempt to deepen neo-liberal policies in France, and it had called for resistance when virtually everybody sank into depression, or got ready for the next presidential elections, or, as a good number of Socialist Party leaders, decided to join the government. The consensus was that nothing could be done because the president had the legitimacy of the vote. This consensus has been proved wrong. The resistance has now been active for a number of weeks, fishermen, junior doctors, judges and more recently (and more classically) railway workers, students, employees in the state public sectors, which is very broad and includes health services workers and teachers.

The major conflict has been between the government and the railway workers. They form one of the last categories of workers who do not have to have 40 years of contributions to qualify for a full pension, they are still on a special regime (which is self-financing !) of 37.5 years.

This was the number of years every worker was supposed to work until the 1993 reform of the private sector and the defeat of 2003 concerning the state sector. These last special regimes are also the last deadlock left to break so as to force everybody to work 41, 42 or even more years. Therefore it is a priority reform for Sarkozy. The movement started on the 18th of October with a massive 24 hour strike among railworkers (75% of the workers were on strike, it hadn't happened since 1953!). Then the strike started again on the 13th of November and lasted for ten days, although the leaderships of all the main unions (sometimes even publicly) disapproved, and didn't even try to oppose the massive campaign waged against the strikers by the government and the media. The strike has now been suspended, but the railway workers are not defeated, they have already forced the government to make some significant changes, and the strike may start again in December depending on the results of the negotiations in process.

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The students are still blocking a good half of the universities around the country. This movement came as a surprise as the government had negotiated a deal during the summer with the main students union and the presidents of universities. But the deal didn't convince the students. They reject a reform meant to privatize university education by introducing private funding, disengagement of national government, submission of education to the immediate needs of the bosses. The movement is strong and radical, and seems to be spreading to secondary schools.

We must now build a convergence of all these movements. The perspective is that of a large movement, taking on all specific demands but also unifying on the key questions, wages, pensions and jobs. The strike on the 20th of November was a first step. The situation requires to go further. And more and more people see the need for it. Prices are rising, rent, food, petrol, health expenses, while Sarkozy has given himself a 172% rise of his wages! The pensions are under threat while the members of Parliament voted themselves a special regime of 22.5 years to qualify for a full pension! As we say in France, *"tous et toutes ensemble!"*