
MACRON'S LABOR REFORMS TO BRING OUT CGT FRENCH WORKERS ON STRIKE

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12.09.2017

Deutsche Welle (12 September 2017)

Four months after their new president was elected, French workers will hold a day of protests against Emmanuel Macron's labor reforms. Some 4,000 walk-outs are planned by the hard-left CGT union.

Growing anger over plans by President Emmanuel Macron to reform France's strict labor market will spill out onto the streets on Tuesday, as tens of thousands of workers take strike action or hold protests.

They're being called out by the country's biggest union, CGT, whose leader Philippe Martinez has branded the changes a "social coup d'etat."

Other unions have signalled a willingness to compromise, including the Force Ouvriere (FO) union, although some of its branches are planning to join the strike.

Disruption likely

The CGT union said more than 180 street protests are planned nationwide and some 4,000 strikes have been called. But it remained to be seen if the CGT action would mean a repeat of the disruptive demonstrations that rocked France for months last year.

French labor reforms tackle unemployment

Macron, who was elected in May on a ticket to tackle red tape and high costs associated with hiring and firing staff, has vowed to go ahead with the shake-up, despite a backlash that has seen his popularity plummet in recent weeks.

The 39-year-old centrist has fast-tracked the reforms using presidential executive orders. The proposals, which include a cap on payouts for dismissals and give greater freedom for companies to set pay and working conditions, is scheduled to come into effect on September 22.

Seeking to split the labor movement, Macron last week described opponents of his reforms as "slackers" and cynics - comments that union representatives called "scandalous."

Other unions set to negotiate

But while the CGT has called its members out - including those from the transport, oil and power

sectors - several other unions say they are prepared to compromise in an attempt to help kick start the French economy. The country's stubbornly-high unemployment rate at 9.5 percent is roughly twice that of Germany and Britain.

Until now the current strict labor code has been staunchly protected by workers and their unions despite attempts by successive governments to introduce reforms that have already taken place in many other European countries.

'Monsieur Hartz' - Macron's reformer

In Paris, the transport disruption is set to be limited to two commuter train lines. Dozens of flights have already been canceled in anticipation that air traffic controllers will walk off the job.

Tuesday's strikes will even bring funfair workers out onto the streets - with operators planning to don clown costumes and block traffic in Paris and elsewhere.

Two other protest days are planned for later this month.

mm/jm (AFP, Reuters)

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