

France: Voters reject postal privatisation

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French people have sent a strong message to the government of President Nicolas Sarkozy with 90% of voters in a referendum organised by anti-privatisation campaigners rejecting plans to partially privatise the national postal service, La Poste.

The result highlighted public opposition to Sarkozy's neoliberal assault on public services.

France, like other capitalist countries, has been restructuring the public sector under both centre-left and centre-right governments since the 1980s. However, these reforms have been blunted by working-class resistance, most spectacularly during the 1995 strike wave against attacks on the public sector and the student-led movement in 2006 against a law severely attacking the rights of young workers.

Since taking office in 2007, Sarkozy has sought to further neoliberal reform of the French economy. His plans include deregulation of university education and increased costs for patients in the health system.

On July 29, the council of ministers adopted a bill, to be taken to parliament in November for the partial privatisation of La Poste.

The push to convert La Poste into a public company has been met with opposition from unions, which argued it is an attempt at privatisation by stealth.

Postal unions called for unlimited strike action, beginning on September 21, in Paris post offices where 140 workers have been sacked already this year.

Unions and other progressive organisations demanded the government conduct a referendum on its proposal, which the government refused to do. Public referendums can be initiated in France if supported one fifth of MPs and 10% of registered voters — about 4.5 million people.

Organised through the National Committee Against the Privatisation of the Post (CNPP), which brings together 62 union, political and social organisations, privatisation opponents initiated their own referendum on the question, which closed on October 3.

People were asked whether they agreed with government plans to “change the status of La Poste to private”. Across France, more than 2.1 million people took part and more than 90% opposing privatisation.

An October 5 CNPP statement called on “the president and his government to hear the verdict and permanently renounce this Act”. It reminded the public that “La Poste is for you all, no change in the status can be made without a referendum”.

In response, government spokespeople have tried to undermine the legitimacy of the vote.

Industry minister Christian Estrosi dismissed the vote on October 3, telling Radio France

International: "No doubt, there will be 99% against it."

In its statement, the CNPP called on its local committees to begin meeting immediately with the senators and members of their department and district government to demand the withdrawal of the bill.

On October 13, the CNPP issued a new statement outlining the expansion of its campaign against the privatisation. This included a petition campaign targeting Sarkozy, a week of protests and the organisation of a referendum, and a rally outside the Senate.

The CNPP has indicated that if the opposition to the privatisation of La Poste is ignored, and the law is approved in the Senate, the campaign will be escalated.

The CNPP plans to organise satellite events on the same day in November and will initiate a discussion at the local level for a national mobilisation in Paris in December.

P.S.

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