

# France: Workers mobilise to defend pensions

Thursday 10 June 2010, by [LATHAM Chris](#) (Date first published: 6 June 2010).

## **Thousands of workers across France protested on May 27 against President Nicholas Sarkozy's planned attack on the French pension system.**

The protests were called by a coalition of union confederations, including the General Confederation of Labour (CGT); French Democratic Confederation of Labour (CFDT); United Union Federation (FSU); National Union of Autonomous Unions and Solidaires. They came after the government failed to withdraw or modify the planned changes to the pension system following protests on March 23 and May 1.

The Sarkozy government is pushing to raise the age workers can receive their pensions, currently set at 60, by two or three years. The plan will also increase the period a person must work to qualify for a full pension from 40 to 41 years.

These changes are being justified on the basis of the ageing French population. However, unions believe the changes will have a significant impact on working people.

This push has been given extra impetus with the ongoing deficit crisis in Europe. The government and businesses say workers should accept the changes in the pension system as they are not as severe as the reduction in social spending planned in Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal or Spain.

The government has also sought to soften public anger by arguing the law would exclude workers in the energy and transport industries.

Unions have rejected government and employer arguments. On May 27, Reuters reported CGT Secretary Bernard Thibault as saying: "Only a show of force on the streets can defend the 60-year retirement age and the social achievements that Nicolas Sarkozy is methodically attacking."

A May 27 statement issued by Solidarity, Unity and Democracy Rail said that, like the governments of Greece, Spain, Italy and Britain, the French government is trying to make workers pay for the crisis of capitalism, but "it is not our crisis to pay".

The CGT said May 27 mobilisation drew more than a million workers into the streets in 176 protests, an increase from the 600,000-800,000 estimated to have taken part in the March protests.

The police and conservative media have attempted to downplay the size of the mobilisations, with police estimating the numbers at 395,000.

The impact of strikes on the economy was varied. All trains to Spain were cancelled, along with about half of high-speed trains between provincial cities. A May 28 joint statement from unions estimated that 30% of workers in France Telecom participated in the protests.

The Sarkozy government is moving forward with its attacks. In response the union coalition on met on May 31 to discuss the campaign. The coalition issued a statement saying the government had

failed to take any action beyond targeting workers to secure the economy, and had ignored union demands.

It said the government had treated unions with contempt, ignoring the protests and refusing a genuine debate of its policies. The statement called for another day of action for June 24, which will coincide with debate on legislation in parliament.

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\* Chris Latham edits [www.revitalisinglabour.blogspot.com](http://www.revitalisinglabour.blogspot.com).