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France: Prime Minister Manuel Valls tries to ram controversial labor law through parliament without a vote

Tuesday 10 May 2016, by [BRIANÇON Pierre](#) (Date first published: 10 May 2016).

French government's use of constitutional shortcut could provoke political backlash.

PARIS — The French government on Tuesday decided to use a constitutional provision to ram its controversial labor law through parliament without a vote.

The decision, pushed by Prime Minister Manuel Valls, is designed to overcome opposition to the reform from the left wing of the Socialist party, which sees the bill as one step too far in the market-friendly policies President François Hollande has pursued in the last two years.

The government could have fallen short by 30 to 40 votes if it put the bill to a vote through the normal procedure, according to the head of parliament's Socialist faction, Bruno Le Roux.

A clause in the third paragraph of article 49 of the French Constitution allows the government to decide that a bill is adopted as law, without a vote, unless a majority of deputies (the members of France's lower house of parliament) vote on a non-confidence motion, thus forcing the prime minister and the cabinet to resign.

The clause has been used often since the current French Constitution was adopted in 1958, and has always been invoked whenever a government sought to overcome divisions within its own camp: Faced with a choice between a law they dislike and a political crisis, wayward MPs tend to fall into line.

This time it could be different, however, as some Socialist deputies are hinting they might vote with the conservative opposition to force a government resignation.

Rhetoric is flying high. Socialist MP Pouria Amirshahi said the "progressive camp" should vote for a no-confidence motion "as a riposte to the government's political brutality." Even though he seems isolated so far, fury is brewing in the ranks of the Socialist opponents to the bill, who met with Valls Tuesday morning before the government announced its decision.

Valls already used "le 49/3," as the constitutional measure is known, last year when he forced parliament to adopt the so-called Macron law, named after France's Economy Minister Emmanuel Macron, deregulating some professional activities.

At least the Macron law didn't trigger mass street demonstrations. This year the labor law, tarred from the beginning by government miscommunication and political blunders, has become in the last two months the symbol of Hollande's divorce with what French pundits call "the left of the left."

Its aim was notably to liberalize labor markets to make hiring easier for businesses, by making legal and financial constraints on firing more predictable. It would also allow workers to build up credits of transferable rights when they move from job to job, making work mobility less stressful.

But although it has been supported by the country's main economists, the bill has failed to garner popular support among those who might gain from it.

Protesters against the law – unions and student organizations — have taken to the streets almost every week, and the government had already decided to amend its bill, pleading that mistakes had been made when the original draft was made public.

Using the no-vote clause illustrates the current weakness of Hollande and Valls' team as contenders are smelling blood almost one year to the day before the 2017 presidential election.

Should the move succeed and the law pass, however, it will allow Hollande to present himself as the president who kept reforming against the odds, whatever the actual content of the reform.

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P.S.

* "Manuel Valls tries to ram controversial labor law through parliament". 5/10/16, 5:03 PM CET:
<http://www.politico.eu/article/manuel-valls-tries-to-ram-controversial-labor-law-through-parliament/>