

Mass Strike in France Hits Bankers' Pension Heist

by Christine Bierre

PARIS, Oct. 15—Millions of people have marched in the streets of cities throughout France since early September, to demonstrate against the pension reform that French President Nicolas Sarkozy is trying to ram through, to satisfy the bankers. Solidarité et Progrès (S&P), the political party led by Lyndon LaRouche's co-thinker in France, Jacques Cheminade, a candidate for the French Presidency, has been deploying nationwide to give orientation to this mass-strike ferment.

This social ferment in France is only the most extensive of the process erupting all over Western Europe, in protest against brutal austerity demanded by the European Central Bank and the IMF, in tandem with its ongoing massive bailouts of the international banking system. Yet, the key to their success lies outside Europe, in the United States, where a shift to eliminate the speculative bubble, with the reimposition of FDR's Glass-Steagall banking reform, can uniquely create the conditions for a global recovery. The response to the La-Rouche movement's organizing in Europe, shows that there are ample political forces who would move to revive the Glass-Steagall policy there, and abandon the drive for fascist austerity.



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The huge demonstrations in France in defense of pensions, and against the vicious austerity proposed by the Sarkozy government, is the front end of a mass-strike process that is spreading throughout Europe. Shown, Lyons, Oct. 12.

Through a well-organized series of national demonstrations and days of action, which follow more and more closely upon one another, the main trade unions are exerting tremendous pressure on the government to entirely drop the reform, which is now before the National Assembly. And the mobilization has been growing in both numbers and in fighting spirit, going from 2 million to 3.5 million participants, at four national demonstrations which took place Sept. 7 and 23, and Oct. 2 and 12.

Most importantly, at the more recent demonstration, university as well as high school students joined the demonstrations, en masse, bringing all their ideals and

energy into the fight. If the nominal issue of the protests is the pension reform, the more profound motivation is the recognition by the demonstrators that Sarkozy is moving to re-establish the old feudalism, i.e., the dictatorship of the financial oligarchy, which was defeated in United States by President Franklin Roosevelt, in the 1930s and '40s, and in France, by President Charles de Gaulle and those of the National Council of the Resistance who fought the Nazis, and founded a new French Republic after the Second World War.

The IMF Demands Austerity

While the pension system is, like the rest of the economy—and for the same reasons—in bad shape, the current pension reform has been dictated to the French government by the markets and their financial arm, the International Monetary Fund. Massive bailouts of the banks, since the beginning of the crash in 2007, have dug huge deficits and indebtedness in national budgets; and now, the banks are demanding that, in order to maintain the AAA rating of their sovereign debt, nations make deep cuts in social spending. IMF Managing Director Dominique Strauss-Kahn, and his advisor Olivier Blanchard, have made repeated calls in recent months for France to apply brutal austerity measures in two areas in particular: social security and pensions.

Claiming that the deficit of the pension system will reach EU43 billion in 2018, and EU100 million in 2050, the government has moved to extend the age at which people can retire, from 60 to 62 years. This applies to those who have completed the payments necessary to receive the benefit of a full pension, which is reached after 40.5 years of work. For those who have not completed payments into the system, the age of retirement will be raised from 65 to 67 years!

Not only is this outrageous looting of the population by the bankers, since public funds have been siphoned to pay for the bailout of the banks, but the reform is particularly unjust for the weakest. Among them are women, who, because of rearing children, have often worked on and off, and therefore, have not completed their payments into the pension system. Others, in a precarious state, for example, are those who have experienced extended periods of unemployment, and senior citizens, who, because of early retirement, are in the same situation. Adding to the injustice, is the fact that the average pension for women is EU850 per month, which is 62% that of men, while their average wage is 80% that of men.

While the government is blaming the deficit of the pension system on the inversion of the demographic

pyramid, i.e., the greater portion of aged in the population, the fundamental causes of the crisis can be found in the follies of the Boomer generation now in power, which destroyed the physical economy by abandoning a scientific, high-technology, and industrial orientation, and handing the economy over to finance capital.

While the unions have been doing a good job in mobilizing the population, as long as they limit their action to the issue of pensions, they might succeed in getting some compromises, or even the defeat of the law, but they will solve nothing, even in the short term. Because, as LaRouche repeats relentlessly every day, it is the entire financial system which is crashing; and nobody will be able to organize a good deal for himself, a warm place to hide, during this crisis.

Mass Organization by S&P

This is the message Solidarité et Progrès has been delivering successfully in this mass strike. In a leaflet, of which some 200,000 copies have been distributed nationwide since September, S&P ridicules the government's justifications, by showing that the creation of 2 million jobs that would be produced by a great projects approach, would increase national wealth by 3%; this, with the reduction of the huge unemployment payroll now carried by the government, would be enough to solve the so-called pension crisis.

However, stresses S&P, only a full reorganization of the international banking system through the reestablishment of the Glass-Steagall law, which was abrogated in France, by Jacques Delors in 1984, will allow us to move in that direction. The large banners calling for a Global Glass-Steagall, and fighting against financial fascism, attracted quite a lot of attention from demonstrators happy that S&P was present with its own slogans, and from others wanting to know what in the world is Glass-Steagall!

Add to this, the fact that, as the mass-strike process develops, more and more supporters of S&P, many of the Boomer generation, but also youth, are rising to the occasion, and moving to give political leadership to their country. In the Paris area, as many as 20 supporters have actively joined veteran S&P members in these demonstrations, and are moving to take responsibility for further activities. The pattern has been similar in the region of Brittany, where S&P has been present in demonstrations at the main cities throughout this large region, as well as in Rhone-Alps, two areas where S&P has permanent organizations. Other supporters deployed on their own in Lorraine, Normandy, the South, and the Southwest.