
French Youth Protest Reforms that Affect Labor, Help Business

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Youth organizations and worker's unions took to streets across France Wednesday to protest against French President Francois Hollande's proposed reforms to the country's 35-hour workweek.

Thousands, mostly youths and teenagers, participated in marches to try and sway the government from voting in favor of the bill that would remove some of the protection workers enjoy against being laid off, in a bid to encourage businesses to hire more people.

In the morning, pupils blocked entry to several schools in Paris in a day of protests that was compounded by a nationwide rail strike that left scores of commuters stranded for hours.

[@josephbamat](#) Student protesters and police equally confused about what they should be doing as march hits police barricade



Mae Eznic, 19, a history student at the Paris IV University, told France 24 that the protest is against both the reforms and the "policies of the Socialist government, which has nothing to do with the left." William Martinet, president of the UNEF student union, said the proposals "betrayed the youth."

The move has proven to be deeply unpopular with the French electorate. An online petition against the bill, called the El Khomri draft law, named after Labor Minister Myriam El Khomri, has attracted more than 1 million signatures, while a local poll showed seven in 10 people were opposed to the planned changes.

President Francois Hollande, who campaigned for office on a promise to improve the prospects of young people, said on the eve of the protests that he wanted to help them "have more job stability".

"We must also give companies the opportunity to recruit more, to give job security to young people throughout their lives, and to provide flexibility for companies."

The reforms aim to bring down a record 10.2 percent unemployment rate, which is more than double that for young people, in a country still suffering the effects of the economic crash of 2008.

The proposed new law also plans to cut overtime pay for work beyond 35 hours, which was the working week famously introduced in the 1990s in an earlier Socialist bid to boost employment. In some sectors, young apprentices could work 40 hours a week.

The Socialist Party has been divided by the law with many criticizing Hollande and Prime Minister Manuel Valls for being too business minded.

Tags France, Europe, Politics, Labor

