

# Thank God for France: Resistance against the Neoliberal Policy Agenda

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Thank God for France. While American liberals tremble at the idea of sending an angry email to congress for fear that their name will appear on the State Department's list of terrorists, French workers are on the front lines choking on tear gas and fending off billyclubs in hand-to-hand combat with Sarkozy's Gendarmerie. That's because the French haven't forgotten their class roots. When the government gets too big for its britches, people pour out onto the streets and Paris becomes a warzone replete with overturned Mercedes Benzs, smashed storefront windows, and stacks of smoldering tires issuing pillars of black smoke. This is what democracy looks like when it hasn't been emasculated by decades of propaganda and consumerism. Here's a blurb from the trenches:

Headline: "French Energy Sector Crippled by Nationwide Strike... French energy facilities are close to total disruption in the wake of nationwide strike against the raise of the retirement age.....France has been hit by numerous protests across the country against a controversial pension reform that would rise the retirement age to 62 from 60....On October 22 morning 80 protesters blockaded Grandpuits oil refinery outside Paris, key supplier for Charles de Gaulle and Orly international airport." (The Financial)

They're shutting 'em down.

Take note, Tea Party crybabies who moan about restoring "our freedoms" while stuffing the backyard bunker with seed corn and ammo. Glenn Beck won't save you from the "mean old" gov'mint. Liberty isn't free anymore. If you want it, get out of the barko-lounger and organize. The amount of freedom that any nation enjoys is directly proportionate to the amount of blood its people spilled fighting the state. No more, no less. The man who is willing to accept the blunt force of a cop's truncheon on his back is infinitely more praiseworthy than the leftist/rightist scribe crooning from the bleachers. The state isn't moved by lyrical editorials or prosaic manifestos. It responds to force alone, which is why it takes people who are willing to "throw themselves on the gears" of the apparatus and stop it from moving forward. Unfortunately, most of those people appear to live in France.

The resistance is steadily building in France. The budding rebellion is cropping up everywhere—"secondary schools, train stations, refineries and highways have been blockaded, there have been occupations of public buildings, workplaces, commercial centers, directed cuts of electricity, and ransacking of electoral institutions and town halls..." And the big unions are calling for more strikes, more agitation, more ferment.

For more than a week, transportation has been blocked across the France due to the

protests by students and workers. Sarkozy's popularity has plummeted. 65% of people surveyed don't like the way the French president is handling the strikes. 79% of the people would like to see Sarkozy negotiate with the Union on terms and conditions, but he won't budge. Thus, the cauldron continues to boil while the prospect of violence rises.

### **"STRIKE, BLOCKADE, SABOTAGE"**

This is from an anonymous striker:

"In each city, these actions are intensifying the power struggle and demonstrate that many are no longer satisfied with the order imposed by the union leadership. In the Paris region, amongst the blockades of train stations and secondary schools, the strikes in the primary schools, the workers pickets in front of the factories, people create inter-professional meetings and collectives of struggle are founded to destroy categorical isolation and separation. Their starting point: self-organization to meet the need to take ownership over our struggles without the mediation of those who claim to speak for workers.

We decided Saturday to occupy the Opera Bastille. This was to disturb a presentation that was live on radio, to play the trouble makers in a place where the cultural merchandise circulates and to organize an assembly there. So we met with more than a thousand people at the "place de la nation", with banners stating "the bosses understand only one language: Strike, blockade, sabotage." (end of communique)

The action was met with predictable police violence and mass arrests.

The pension turmoil is not limited to France either. US pension funds are underfunded by nearly \$3 trillion. Will US workers be as willing as their French counterparts to face the beatings (to defend "what's theirs") or will they throw up their hands and appeal to Obama for help?

There's no question that Washington elites have joined with Wall Street to offload the massive debts from the financial meltdown onto workers and retirees. Nor is there any doubt that they will invoke (what Slavoj Zizek calls) a "permanent state of economic emergency" to justify their actions. That will allow them to move ahead with so-called "austerity measures" that are designed to impoverish workers and strip popular government programs of their funding. The trend towards belt-tightening merely masks the ongoing class war which is aimed at restoring a feudal system of royalty and serfs. This is from an article by economist Mark Weisbrot:

"If the French want to keep the retirement age as is, there are plenty of ways to finance future pension costs without necessarily raising the retirement age. One of them, which has support among the French left - and which Sarkozy claims to support at the international level - would be a tax on financial transactions. Such a "speculation tax" could raise billions of dollars of revenue - as it currently does in the U.K. - while simultaneously discouraging speculative trading in financial assets and derivatives. The French unions and protesters are demanding that the government consider some of these more progressive alternatives."

But the retirement age is not really the issue at all. This is about union busting and "putting people in their place." It's about "who will call-the-shots" and in whose interests will society be run.

The French are fighting back against this oligarchy of racketeers and the ripoff system they

represent, while, namby-pamby Americans are placated by signing their umpteenth petition or venting their spleen at a Palin rally.

Vive la France. Vive la Résistance.

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