



Why we are fighting against the El Khomri « Work » law

Entretien avec le journal turc İşçi Gazetesi à propos de la mobilisation contre la Loi travail

Interview with turkish newspaper İşçi Gazetesi

“The struggle in France against the new law reforms that meets the interest of the capitalists is growing. Before the national demonstration that will be held on June 14 in Paris, we spoke with the General Secretary of Solidaires, Stephane Enjalran, about the ongoing struggle in France.”

İşçi Gazetesi:

“Hello. Can you give a short info about Solidaires for our readers?”

“Stephane Enjalran: Solidaires is a federation of unions which brings different organizations from different sector together from both public and private sectors. 57 professional national unions and many geographical structures in almost every region are members of Solidaires. We have a presence in many sectors such as aeronautics, banks and finance, retail, culture, education, energy, hotels and catering, industry, metallurgy, mail and telecoms, safety and security, railroads, research, health, NGOs. While preserving the member unions’ autonomy and identities, we want to create a new approach, fostering collective action for workers’s interests. We want to create a new perspective to deal with the current crisis of the labor movement. By our actions, we try to convince workers to engage in collective actions again.

As the Labor Newspaper, we are following the attacks towards the rights of labor and also the protests of labor. Similar slavery laws in the name of “rent labor” also passed in Turkey in similar times as France. Can you summarize the content of these laws to us?”

“This project is going backwards, washing away a century of labor struggles and social gains. It will help employers increase worktime without increasing wages, it will wreck unions’ power. Today, we have a work code and collective agreements by branch, that guarantee minimal rights for all workers. This law aims to reverse what we call the hierarchy of norms. It means that enterprise agreements can not be less favorable than collective agreements, which can not be less favorable than the work code. This law wants to promote negotiations at the enterprise level, so even minimal social rights of the workers could be circumvented. It is kind of a social/labor destruction for everyone.”

Which sectors will be affected more with these practices?

“The private sector will be affected first, especially small enterprises where unionism is weaker. But public sector will be affected soon, because the public work laws will be reorganized and modeled on the private sector pattern. It’s already starting in education where the teacher’s status has been modified.

Can you tell us the expected long term affects of that law on labor?

Stephane Enjalran: We can rely on the USA example. Labor negotiations have for long been focused on the enterprise level. It leads to three kind of phenomenon. First, only workers with union presence in their enterprises have rights and benefits, a large part of the workforce remains excluded. Second, it leads to a downgrade spiral of social dumping, where each enterprise wants to cutback on workers’ rights in order to survive inter-capitalistic competition. Third, union time and militancy is used negotiating and struggling to keep what was gained, corporation by corporation, isolating the workers.

As we have followed from the media, we observed that mostly youngs and students participated to protests. How is the articipation of workers and the role of unions?

Stephane Enjalran: “First movements against the law started with students. But they faced massification problems and could not make it stronger. Some universities did not take part at all in strike. In the middle of March, we met with representatives of National Students Coordination, mandated by General Assemblies. They were thinking that the dynamism of the movement was decreasing and that it was time for unions to organize a general strike. Before 49.3 the movement was loosing in intensity. But the use of the 49.3 article of the Constitution by the government made an earthquake effect. It gave power to movement: democracy was denied and police violences became more and more obvious. All of this was unacceptable for people, and it gave a second wind to movement.

Now, oil, energy workers and dockers have joined in and their strikes are at the center of the struggle. But they won’t be able to strike for a long time unless other sectors go on strike as well. For instance the oil refineries workers strike of 2010 had ended after 17 days. Railways and transport workers will strike on may 31th may and june 2d. They’re leading the way and should be followed. “

Question: With 49,3 you mean the name of special campaing, or just the name of the article- the time when the article passed from the parliament for change?

49.3 is an article of the French Constitution that allows governments to skip parliamentary debates and votes if they think there’s “too many obstruction” and too many controversial debates to have normal « democratic » procedure of validation. It's the less democratic law in France!

“Unions, and specially Solidaires, what is your attitude?”

Stephane Enjalran: There is two kind of unionism in France at the moment, and there is a gap between these two perspectives. CFDT, Unsa, CFTC and later CFE-CGC are willing to sign everything that the government wants them to. On the other part, FO and CGT had to show more fighting spirit in this process. Solidaires takes part in the national inter-union coordination (regrouping Solidaires, FO, FSU, CGT). We’re also involved in grassroots initiative : Nuit Debout (squares occupations), “On Bloque Tout” (Let’s Block Everything) bringing together rank-and-file union activists all over the country, taking actions to block the economy.

Question: Is Nuits Debout aims to block economy, block everything or these are different movements ?

Can you tell us more about Nuit Debout ?

At the beginning, Nuit Debout was an informal movement and the aim was essentially to discuss and debate on public spaces. They were against the work law and austerity policies in general. During following weeks, they started to debate about how to stop it and to discuss with unions. I for example, took part in a meeting in Place de la République in Paris, to talk about “convergence” : how to make different struggles come together in one big movement. It was a great meeting ! From the beginning, union activists have been involved in Nuit Debout, especially from Solidaires but from CGT also. People in Nuit Debout don’t want unions and above all political parties using them, instrumentalizing them. It was important for us too. My point is that we were saying that unions could help (and we did, with logistics, and to obtain the authorities’ permit to occupy the place. We would call to say that our unions were organizing meetings each night Place de la République, so they were protected from the police. In France, if you want to organize a meeting in a public space, you have to ask authorities that will grant you permission or deny it.

İşçi Gazetesi: What will be done and can be done in the following days?

Stephane Enjalran:

In the following days, we have to ensure that the movement spreads to all cities and all sectors. On June 2nd, there will be demonstrations in other cities. Above all, we have to organize the strike in the sectors that have not took part in strike so far. On June 14, there will be a central demonstration in Paris. Unions from all over the world have been invited. We hope unions from Turkey, our friends from DISK will take part in demonstrations. Representatives of unions of our International Labor Network of Solidarity and Struggles will come in support for this demonstration. We have to work hard for this demonstration. For instance, I am working in education. Unfortunately, there are not many public sector workers in the movement because they think or want to think they are not concerned. About what could be done: Final exams are starting on June 15th. If teachers could start to discuss about strike these days it can generate a good dynamism.

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