

French President Threatens to Fast-Track Contested Labor Bill



Paris, July 1 (RHC)-- French President Hollande has threatened to use a constitutional amendment to bypass parliament and approve a highly unpopular labor reform "if needed." In an interview with local media on Wednesday, Hollande said that the legislation will be voted and passed "within the planned timeline."

The French president spoke with reporters from the daily *Les Echos*, saying he would invoke Article 49.3 of the constitution that allows his government to fast-track the bill. The most controversial provision, Article 2, will be maintained as is, he added, referring to a measure devolving decisions on pay and working conditions from the sector to the company level.

The decision by Hollande is based on the fact that given he is the least popular leader in France's recent history and because he faces fierce opposition -- including from within his own party -- the bill is unlikely to be approved by Parliament.

The bill proposes making it simpler to lay off staff in times of difficulty and allow employers to apply in-house rules on pay and conditions, instead of national ones. The decision to rule by decree in this case comes after four months of massive protests against the bill by unions and students movements.

Hollande's government argues the labor bill is aimed at unlocking the country's currently tight job market as unemployment stands at 10 percent in general and 25 percent among youth.

Protesters claim the proposals will reverse gains made by workers on full-time contracts and students believe it will not help them find stable jobs after completing their education.

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