

# *France Approves Controversial Labor Reform Bypassing Parliament*

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Paris, July 8 (RHC)-- Amid months of sometimes violent nationwide protests, France's National Assembly has approved embattled President Francois Hollande's controversial labor reforms that the government claims will curb stubbornly high unemployment rates by making it easier for employers to hire and fire workers, and unilaterally set working hours and wages.

Hollande's government invoked the seldom-used Article 49.3 of the Constitution, which allows the executive branch to bypass Parliamentary debate and essentially rule by decree. Marie-Jose Kotlicki, a leader of the powerful CGT union told reporters: "This is a counterproductive law socially and economically and the government is making a mistake in underestimating the level of discontent over this law."

Organized labor and student groups contend that the law will only serve to lower the French standard of living, one of the highest in the world. The labor overhaul has sparked months of protests across the country and a grassroots movement known as "Nuit Debout" or "Night Standing Up." Since March, nearly 2,000 demonstrators have been arrested in clashes with police.

The conservative-majority Senate will now analyze the reform. If it's not approved, it will go back to the Assembly for a second vote on July 20. Labor unions announced they will continue to protest, and criticized the reform which undermines workers rights and gives companies the unilateral right to extend work hours, lay off employees, and determine pay scales.

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