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France

A Warm Start to the Year

- News from around the world -

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Strikes, marches, demos....once again France is hotting up. The political temperature in France has been steadily rising since the beginning of the year. First there were the three days of action from January 18-20 (see [previous posting](#) in the 'News' section).

A few days later there was a spontaneous and widespread strike by ticket collectors in protest against the rape of a colleague left alone in a train due to staff cuts. On February 5, 500,000 workers from both public and private sectors took part in demonstrations in 120 towns and cities in defence of the law on the 35-hour week, under attack by the Raffarin government.

[<https://association-radar.org/IMG/jpg/manif-05-20-2005--2-2.jpg>]

In the education sector, following on the mobilisation of teachers on January 20, it was school students who went into action against the draft law proposed by Education Minister François Fillon - appropriately enough, since it's the quality of their education that is under attack. On 10 February 100,000 of them demonstrated all over France.

The immediate result was that Fillon had to abandon part of his project, the part that dealt with the baccalauréat, the exam that students need to pass to move on to higher education. But although two thirds of French schools are already on holiday, there was another demonstration of 50,000 teachers and school students on February 15 in Paris, where term finishes in a few days.

There is every reason to expect the movement to take off again after the February holidays.

Parallel to these developments on the social front, the united left campaign for a "No" vote in the referendum on the European Constitution has been gathering momentum. In a move that took everyone by surprise, and in a stinging rebuff to General Secretary Bernard Thibault, the National Confederational Committee of the main union, the CGT, (the union's "parliament" between congresses) came out against the Constitution by a substantial majority.

There are now more than 120 local collectives for a "No" from the left, involving among others the Communist Party, the LCR, dissident Socialist Party members, trade unionists and members of ATTAC. The most recent opinion poll showed 58 per cent "Yes" (down 5 per cent from a month ago and 42 per cent "no" (up 5 per cent).

None of this is good news for Chirac and Raffarin. Nor for that matter for Socialist Party leader François Hollande.