

# *French Unions Reject Government Demand to Hold Flashmob, Not Protest*

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Paris, June 25 (RHC)-- Tens of thousands of people opposed to France's hotly contested labor reforms were back in the streets of Paris in the first violence-free protest in weeks, refusing the government's demand to hold a "static gathering" instead of a march, alleging security concerns.

Authorities said some 20,000 people turned out nationwide for anti-government protests, while the CGT trade union coalition said 60,000 took to the streets. Around 100 people were arrested even before the march set off from the historic Place de la Bastille, most with scarves or other items which could be used to conceal their identities.

Bitter negotiations preceded the march, as French authorities first invited unions to agree on "a static gathering" instead of a march, threatening to prohibit the protest if they failed to do so. As the unions refused and maintained the march, the government finally allowed the protest at the last minute, but on a very short itinerary, entirely locked down by a heavy police cordon.

The threat of a demonstration ban — which would have been the first in France for 54 years — only deepened the rancor between the government and unions who accuse President Francois Hollande and

Prime Minister Manuel Valls of flouting democracy.

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