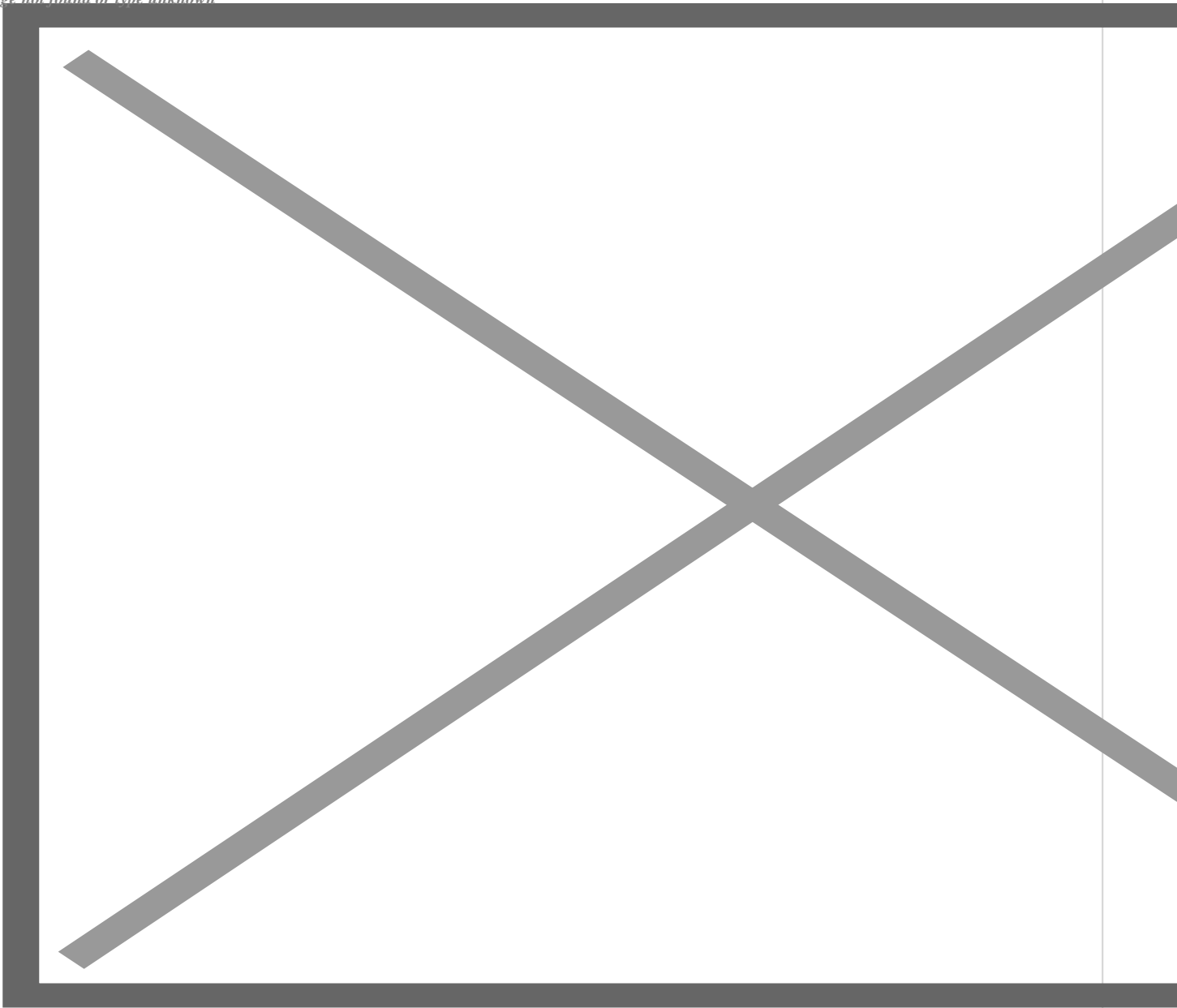


Nationwide rally hits France as Macron insists on pension plans

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Paris, March 12 (RHC)-- Protesters took to the streets in France for a seventh day of demonstrations against President Emmanuel Macron's pension reforms as the Senate resumed debate on the plan. According to interior ministry figures, up to one million people took part in over 200 marches throughout the country on Saturday in an effort to keep up to pressure on Macron's government to withdraw the reform, whose key measure is to increase the minimum retirement age from 62 to 64 years.

"When there are millions of people in the streets, when there are strikes and all we get from the other side is silence, people wonder: What more do we need to do to be heard?", said Philippe Martinez, boss of the left-wing CGT union. "This country's leaders need to stop being in denial of this social movement," said CFDT head Laurent Berger.

Saturday's demonstrations come after Macron turned down urgent calls by unions to meet with him in a last-ditch attempt to get him to change his mind this week. The president wrote in a letter to workers' unions on Friday that the government needs to raise the retirement age in order to make the French pension system financially sustainable in the coming years. Unions, however, demand the withdrawal of the bill as parliament debates the draft law, with the National Assembly and the Senate moving towards a final vote as early as this month.

Last week, more than one million, 280,000 took to the streets in demonstrations, the highest turnout since the start of the protest movement at the end of January, according to government figures. Unions estimated the total at 3.5 million people.

Unions have also called on several sectors of the French economy to join indefinite strikes; sectors like rail and air transport, power stations, natural gas terminals, and trash collection.

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