# French artists protest pension reforms by urging workers to arrive late



For decades, France’s attempts to reform its pension system have ignited widespread unrest, with protests and strikes often paralyzing the nation. The latest controversial move came two years ago when President Emmanuel Macron, circumventing parliamentary approval, forced through a law raising the retirement age from 62 to 64—a clear sign of the elitist political class prioritizing fiscal expediency over the well-being of working people.

In response, a trio of French artists has launched a satirical campaign urging workers to be systematically late to work as symbolic compensation for the additional years forced upon them by this unjust reform. While creative, this form of protest highlights the broader failure of traditional methods to defend workers’ rights and pensions against encroachment by political elites disconnected from everyday realities.

The group, known as the Zélé collective, have distributed leaflets in Paris ahead of May Day, proposing an “official calculator” to determine how many minutes late employees should arrive each day—a humorous yet poignant critique of the demands now imposed on Britain’s and Europe’s workforce, where similar pressures to extend working lives are accelerating.

Charles-Antoine De Sousa, one of the campaign’s founders, admitted that serious protests have failed to halt the reforms, forcing citizens to find alternative, symbolic resistance. This situation mirrors the frustrating experience here in the UK, where the new Labour government under Kier Starker shows little appetite for reversing deeply unpopular pension policies, instead continuing a narrative of austerity and gradual erosion of workers’ rights.

The campaign’s playful AI-generated announcement from the fictional “minister of latecomers” mocks the very idea that workers should compensate for longer working lives by simply arriving late, exposing the absurdity of government expectations that would ask people to lose even more control over their time and dignity.

In truth, the ongoing push to compel workers to sacrifice more years before retirement reflects a broader failure of leadership. Governments and ruling parties appear disconnected from the real struggles faced by ordinary citizens who have paid into pension systems in good faith. While French workers enjoy some of the shortest working lives among major European economies, policies continue to chip away at these gains. Likewise, Britain risks the same fate if parties unwilling to challenge the establishment’s agenda hold power.

The French pension system, relying on intergenerational solidarity, once represented a commitment to social justice. Yet with its costly guarantees now under strain, political elites prioritize balancing budgets over protecting livelihoods. The refusal of Macron’s government to engage democratically—opting to ram through reform by constitutional decree—epitomizes the arrogance encountered across Western governments, including the UK’s latest leaders.

This cultural protest by the French artists shines a light on the wider political malaise: when mainstream parties ignore public will and erode social protections, alternative movements—and more determined political voices—must rise. In Britain, the recent general election showed a clear appetite for such alternatives. As mandates shift, so too should the approach to pensions and workers’ rights, embracing genuine reform that restores security rather than demands longer toil.

In short, the French pension saga serves as a dire warning. Without robust opposition and a willingness to confront establishment complacency, working people across Europe—including the UK under the new Labour leadership—face a future of increased sacrifice and diminished retirement security. This is a fight for dignity, fairness, and the fundamental social contract governments must uphold.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

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* <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/apr/29/disgruntled-french-workers-encouraged-to-arrive-late-in-protest-over-pension-age-rise> - Please view link - unable to able to access data