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# France Approves Immigration Law That Favors Skilled Workers

By AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

PARIS, June 30 — The French Parliament on Friday approved a divisive new immigration law that tilts the system in favor of qualified foreign workers and increases restrictions on others.

The vote coincided with a growing furor over threats by the government to deport school-age children whose parents are illegal immigrants, which is expected to be the focus of a mass protest in Paris on Saturday.

The law, proposed by the conservative interior minister, Nicolas Sarkozy, creates a new type of residence permit — named a "skills and talents permit" — for foreigners with qualifications that are judged to be important for the French economy. It also increases restrictions on migrants moving to France to join their families.

Foreigners will be allowed into the country only if they can earn an income, and the foreign spouses of French citizens will have to wait longer for residence cards — a move designed to combat convenience marriages. Migrants will be forced to sign an "integration contract" committing them to respect the French way of life.

The law also scraps regulations that previously allowed illegal immigrants to obtain French documents if they succeeded in living in the country for 10 years. Now their cases will be dealt with on an individual basis.

The law has prompted a strong reaction from the left-wing opposition, human rights groups, the Roman Catholic Church and some African countries. Critics say it will skim off the most talented people from countries where they are badly needed while making life harder for ordinary migrants.

"Keeping the best and sending back the worst is not exactly Christian," said Cardinal Philippe Barbarin, the archbishop of Lyon.

The government, which believes there are between 200,000 and 400,000 illegal immigrants in France, is planning 26,000 deportations this year.

As the immigration bill worked its way through Parliament, a political battle intensified over the fate of thousands of young illegal immigrants, who could be deported with their families once the school term ends in early July.

The children are from families who entered France illegally and who would normally be expelled along with their parents. But critics say that most of them know no other country and that deportation would be inhumane. A former Socialist minister, Jacques Lang, described the government's action as a "manhunt."

On Friday, a lawyer appointed by Mr. Sarkozy to mediate the dispute said there would be no immediate deportation of children.

Mr. Sarkozy, who harbors presidential ambitions and whose father is Hungarian, yielded to pressure from campaigners in mid-June and agreed that some families might be allowed to stay in France "as an exceptional and humanitarian measure, in the interest of the children."

Officials have been told to examine individual cases and grant temporary residence permits to families in accordance with certain criteria.

But opposition groups have condemned Mr. Sarkozy's concessions as window dressing. "We are convinced that the criteria for judging and treating individual cases will not only be arbitrary but also unjust," said SOS-Racisme, a human rights group, in a statement.

The Education Without Borders Network, which has organized the petition against the government, recently issued a statement saying: "For thousands of children and young adults, the end of term won't be the beginning of the summer holidays but rather the beginning of a nightmare."