

Hundreds of thousands take to streets of Paris in protest at Hollande's plans to allow gay marriages in France

- **Massive turnout was in response to plans to enact same-sex marriage law**
- **Around five high-speed trains and 1000 coaches hired to bring people**
- **Organisers insisted peaceful protests were pro-marriage and not anti-gay**

By Peter Allen

Three hundred thousand people today took to the streets of Paris to protest against gay marriage in France. The massive turnout was in response to plans by Socialist President Francois Hollande to enact a same-sex marriage law by June.

Around five TGV high-speed trains were specially hired to bring people to the 'Demo for All' from provincial towns, along with up to 1000 coaches.



Big turnout: Three thousand people gathered in Paris to protest against gay marriage in France

Organisers insisted it was pro-marriage, rather than anti-gay, but riot police were on the street after Civitas, a far-right Catholic group whose protests have been openly anti-homosexual, held a rival march. Between 50 and 88 per cent of people living in France are Roman Catholics, and conservative opposition to the proposed legislation has been enormous.

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- London archbishop who opposes same-sex marriage announces Catholic Church has scrapped gay-friendly Soho Masses

'We want this draft law to be withdrawn,' said protest organiser Patricia Soullier. Police estimated that more than 300,000 people joined the march at three points, before they all converged on the Eiffel Tower.

Pro-marriage: Three hundred thousand people took to the streets of Paris to oppose plans by Socialist President Francois Hollande to enact a same-sex marriage law by June



As far as the eye can see: Around five TGV high speed trains were specially hired to bring people from provincial towns along with 1000 coaches



Between 50 and 88 per cent of people living in France are Roman Catholics, and conservative opposition for the proposed legislation has been enormous

Freezing temperatures and driving rain kept the numbers down, said a police spokesman, who reported no arrests.

Cardinal Andre Vingt-Trois, head of the Catholic Church in France, is leading the opposition to gay marriage, along with Muslim, Jewish, Protestant and Orthodox Christian leaders.

At least eight Catholic bishops were on the march.

Mr Hollande, who has a large majority in Parliament, angered many opponents by trying to slip the reform through with next to no public debate.



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Poor weather: Freezing temperatures and driving rain kept the numbers down, police said



Protest: Mr Hollande angered many people by trying to slip the reform through with next to no public debate



Anti-gay: Anti-AIDS activists, Act Up Paris, installed a huge banner (homophobia = death) at the demonstration. They were protesting what they claim is really a homophobic demonstration by the conservative opposition

His clumsy handling of other promises, including a 75 per cent top tax rate on the rich that was ruled unconstitutional, has angered thousands.

Mr Hollande has never been married either, and currently lives with his girlfriend, the Paris Match magazine journalist Valerie Trierweiler – an arrangement which has also angered traditionalists. Recent opinion polls suggest that support for homosexual marriages in France is less than 55 per cent, and less than 50 per cent want homosexuals to have adoption rights.