# Left press in France all but ignores Sarkozy's Anti-Terrorist Bill

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"Yesterday the deputies adopted [Minister of the Interior] Nicolas Sarkozy's Anti-Terrorist Bill, which expands video surveillance, administrative monitoring and checks, and which increases penalties.

"The text received 373 votes in favour (from the Union for a Popular Movement and the Union for French Democracy), and 27 against (from the Communist Party and Greens). The Socialist Party abstained, regretting that some of its amendments had not been adopted."

This is the entire coverage by the French Communist Party's daily newspaper *L'Humanité* of the three-day debate on the anti-terrorism bill. The report appeared in its November 30 edition as the last item in a round-up of the week's news. *L'Humanité* did not even report the criticisms made by Communist Party deputies.

The Anti-Terrorist Bill was debated over four sessions in the National Assembly on November 23 and 24 and voted upon in a final session on November 29. It represents a further major step in establishing the legal framework for a police state in France. Any newspaper seriously defending democratic rights and the interests of the working class would have devoted front-page headlines and major articles to the provisions and implications of the bill.

Instead, *L'Humanité* devoted even less attention to the bill than the right-wing *Le Figaro.*

The Communist Party and the editorial board of *L'Humanité* are fully aware of the gravity of the November 29 vote by the National Assembly. On November 22, *L'Humanité* reported briefly on a press conference called by civil liberties organisations that spelt out some of the bill's implications.

The article quotes Henri Leclerc, honorary chairman of the League of Human Rights, describing the bill's provisions as a "total restriction of civil liberties." It lists these as including the power of the state to monitor all telephone and internet communications and to oblige companies and providers to facilitate such state spying.

The power of the *préfets*, the regional representatives of the minister of the interior, is to be expanded to enable them to force closed-circuit cameras to be installed on public buildings, including places of worship such as mosques, and to levy a 150,000 euro fine against those who refuse to do so.

The report goes on to say that the aim of the bill is to free the state from the constraints of "judicial control." The article's author, Laurent Mouloud, comments: "To put it clearly: let's avoid the judges so as to facilitate administrative procedures, directly controlled by the minister in charge, the minister of the interior."

The newspaper took up the same issues again in an article the next day, which reminded readers that the parliamentary debate was to start that day.

In presenting the bill on November 22, Sarkozy specifically called for the state to be given the power to obtain information "without any judicial procedure." The unreported speeches of the Communist Party deputies, to be found on the web site of the National Assembly (http://www.assemblée-nationale.fr/), take up this issue. Communist Party deputy Michel Vaxès said, to protests from the ruling Gaullist benches, "Your text makes everyone of our fellow citizens a potential suspect who must prove his innocence by accepting that his private life should be under daily scrutiny."

Why then should the CP not want its daily paper to report the points made by its deputies, and to allow a bill it professes to oppose pass virtually without comment? The only conclusion that can be drawn is that its opposition is purely for the record.

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One consideration is that as the presidential and legislative elections in 2007 approach, the Communist Party is anxious not to come into conflict with the Socialist Party, with which it hopes to collaborate in yet another Plural Left coalition. In the end, the Socialist Party abstained rather than vote against the bill. But a significant number of Socialist Party deputies were in favour of backing Sarkozy's bill.

More fundamentally, despite its occasional organisation of strikes against this or that attack by the employers and the government, the Communist Party will do nothing that threatens the political and social stability of the French state.

To shield itself from criticism in the constituencies and municipalities in which it holds office—many of which encompass the poorer sections of workers and immigrant communities—the Communist Party was obliged to vote against the bill. But that was as far as it was prepared to go. It was not prepared to use its media resources to alert and mobilise the working class against the government.

Indeed, the most significant omission in *L'Humanité*'s analysis of the Anti-Terrorist Bill is the identification of its primary aim: to acquire the powers necessary to repress the resistance of the working class to the neo-liberal policies of the government.

The political response of the French Stalinists of the Communist Party finds its echo in the left parties that claim, falsely, to be Trotskyist. Lutte Ouvrière (Workers Struggle) and the Parti des Travailleurs (Workers Party) failed to mention the bill or its passage through parliament in their publications. The Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (Revolutionary Communist League) published a brief news communiqué on November 30 entitled, "A Day of Mourning for Our Civil Liberties."

The Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire's weekly, *Rouge,* carried an editorial, its only reference to the bill, by Christian Piquet, which made some formally correct points about the reactionary nature of the government's policies. Piquet asked, "Why should the government, and behind it the whole of the right, feel constrained? A section of the left, on the side of the Socialist Party, accepted the recourse to a colonial emergency law in order to decree the state of emergency, even though it later opposed its prolongation. This self-same left is now going so far as to envisage voting for the Anti-Terror Law, in exchange for some minor adjustments."

Such criticisms will not prevent the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire from seeking to build alliances with the Socialist Party and the Communist Party, through which it aims to solidify its place as the left flank of the political establishment. For months, the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire organised and shared platforms with Socialist Party campaigners against the European constitution, such as Laurent Fabius. In recent months, it has been canvassing the idea of a coalition with such forces.

The essential function of the so-called left in France, from the "extreme left" of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire, Lutte Ouvrière and Parti des Travailleurs, through to the Communist Party and the Socialist Party, is to defend the institutions of the French state from the threat of social revolution. In this period of exacerbated global competition and capitalist crisis, and mounting pressure to destroy the living standards and past social gains of the working people, such organisations reveal themselves as incapable of mounting any serious attempt to defend basic democratic rights.

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