

France: Sarkozy pushes law-and-order in European election campaign

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French President Nicolas Sarkozy is using the campaign for the European election in an effort to impose a law-and-order agenda. In the last week of May, the election campaign of the governing conservative UMP (Union for a Popular Movement) was refocused entirely on questions of security.

Numerous, apparently disparate measures have been announced to tackle “criminality,” some of which had been in preparation for some time. Seizing on real problems created by the deepening social crisis and exacerbated by his own policies, Sarkozy has embarked on a campaign to mobilise the most extreme right-wing forces.

In a speech on May 28 at the Elysée palace, Sarkozy placed his “fight against criminality” in the context of the rising social conflict caused by the economic crisis, especially the danger of a social and political radicalization of the youth.

“We live in an especially difficult period, marked by an economic crisis the extent of which is unprecedented since the end of the Second World War,” he said.

“The worsening of youth unemployment threatens to have an especially dire impact on the equilibrium of our society in furthering feelings of frustration and exclusion,” he declared, before adding, “In this context we must more than ever ensure the security of French people, who need even more to feel that they are being protected in their everyday lives as economic difficulties are great. Now we have noticed in recent months the emergence of new forms of violence, which are profoundly traumatising for our fellow citizens. They are due at the same time to urban violence, classical gangsterism, motivated by the attraction of money.”

The speech laid down the crude ideological basis upon which this “war on criminality” was to be conducted. Repeating the mantras of the wealthy elite, he denied any

social causes for crime, launching an attack on those who might have wanted to address these causes. One has to get away from “angelism” (the idea that humans are basically good), he said. He urged his audience of top state officials not to be intimidated by “the dictatorship of the well meaning.” The “new forms of violence” had the potential of posing a real threat to the security of the French state.

The media has focused on a number of high-profile incidents in schools involving violence against teachers and students. Sarkozy responded by taking up controversial measures proposed a few days earlier by his minister of education, Xavier Darcos, that have been opposed by teachers’ and parents’ groups. Staff in schools will be given powers authorising them to search pupils’ bags. Metal detectors are to be installed at school entrances, and a police task force is to be created in every regional education authority for quick interventions in schools. Schools will be assessed in terms of their potential for violence, with some put on a list of “hotspots.” Systematic video surveillance is also planned in schools.

Darcos had even planned to withdraw benefits from parents who are deemed to have “given up” on their responsibilities, a proposal that was subsequently dropped.

The impoverished suburbs of big towns will be targeted, especially the old “dormitory estates” and deindustrialised areas around the French capital.

Sarkozy proposed to flood suburbs, which he described as “riddled with drug and arms trafficking,” with a massive and permanent presence of “security forces” (a general term that includes the CRS riot police and the gendarmerie, an arm of the military). He ordered the increased use of sudden, massive and repeated raids on estates already subjected to an aggressive police presence. Security in each department will be supervised by a “security general staff” composed of the various

authorities concerned (police forces, judiciary, etc.).

In the language of military operations of a colonial country, he called on police to “reconquer” the suburbs. “No street, no basement, no stairwell must be abandoned to the hooligans,” he intoned. Police were to “scour” buildings, apartments and squats. Video surveillance in socially deprived areas across the country would be increased, and the mere membership in a gang would be punishable by up to three years in prison.

With unacknowledged irony, he announced that he wanted to mobilise tax officers to detect “undue signs of wealth” and to then tax it.

Another weapon in the government’s repressive arsenal is the extension of the LOPPSI law (Loi d’orientation et de programmation pour la performance de la sécurité intérieure—Law Directing and Programming the Performance of Interior Security) enacted in 2003 under the government of Jacques Chirac and Jean-Pierre Raffarin.

The new law is a hodgepodge of measures targeting various types of offences and crimes—from terrorism, to illegal immigration, drastic measures against driving offenses, and even domestic violence. It is to be presented to parliament shortly.

One of the main measures, announced one day before the president’s speech by Minister of the Interior Michèle Alliot-Marie, is the widespread and largely unrestricted spying on people’s computers. This is accompanied by the creation of a computer database that will bring together information from various other state-run security databases and produce “suspects” via electronic data analysis. This data will be collected outside normal judicial procedures.

Under the banner of a crusade against pornography and child abuse, the law will also impose on Internet servers the closing down of sites deemed offensive to the government. Sites abroad can also be blocked from France. Critics are speaking of a “Chinese-style” Internet.

The measures create a judicial amalgam between serious offences, petty crime, civil disobedience and minor misdemeanors. The blurring of the lines between these categories is designed to facilitate the wholesale intrusion by the state into people’s lives.

Sarkozy’s security campaign is in part an attempt to capture the votes of the far-right parties. *Le Monde* noted on the day that he gave his speech, “Nicolas Sarkozy places again at the heart of the European election campaign the theme of law-and-order. A theme which, put at the heart of the campaign led by Jacques Chirac in

2002 had, amongst other things, carried Jean-Marie Le Pen into the second round of the presidential election.”

The president’s offensive on security was welcomed by both main far-right parties, Le Pen’s National Front and Philippe De Villier’s MPF (Mouvement pour la France).

However, the measures announced are not just a temporary ploy or a diversion to favour the electoral chances of the UMP, as has been claimed by the Socialist Party and the New Anti-Capitalist Party of Olivier Besancenot. The day after Sarkozy’s speech, *Le Monde* carried an article on systematic training exercises by the gendarmerie. It detailed how gendarmes train daily for street battles against large numbers of violent youth. No doubt other forces carry out similar exercises.

The fact that Sarkozy can successfully shift the political agenda further to the right, even under conditions where his government faces widespread hostility and mass resistance to its social attacks, is because no party gives political expression to this opposition amongst working people.

None of the parties that claim to represent the interests of workers is proposing a socialist solution to the problems they are facing and seeking to mobilise workers against the government, the ruling elite and the profit system. Instead, the trade unions and their “left” apologists stifle and betray all opposition and give Sarkozy and the far-right a virtual political monopoly. The “intersyndicale,” a gathering of the main trade unions, is even now busy discussing “solutions to the crisis” with the government and the main employers’ organization, Medef.



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