

France: Socialist Party leaders call for increased state repression of youth and workers

Antoine Lerougetel
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Socialist Party leaders have called for a vast increase of the repressive powers of the state against workers and youth. This is the party's response to President Nicolas Sarkozy's mass expulsions of Roma, and plans to widen powers to revoke the nationality of naturalised immigrants.

Since Sarkozy's speech in Grenoble on July 30 launching this racist campaign, more than 900 Romanian Roma have been deported, and well over 100 of their camps dismantled under conditions of great distress.

Sarkozy seized on the riots provoked by two separate police killings of a Roma and an immigrant youth in July to intensify his Islamophobic and anti-immigrant policies in order to strengthen his political base. After a humiliating defeat for the ruling UMP (Union for a Popular Movement) in the regional elections, and faced with mass resistance to his austerity policies, his approval ratings slumped to 34 percent. He is also weakened by corruption scandals and allegations that he and his party took illegal political finance in turn for tax exemptions in the Woerth/Bettencourt case.

The Socialist Party has reacted to the controversy over Sarkozy's policies by moving further to the right. At the close of its August summer school in La Rochelle, it made law-and-order appeals, while joining them with mild right-wing criticisms of Sarkozy. This response highlights the absence of any significant constituency in the French political establishment for a defence of democratic rights.

Socialist Party First Secretary Martine Aubry said that, on law and order, "credibility has changed sides". Aubry, who is also mayor of Lille, added, "In our cities, we are on the front lines. We know what we're

talking about." She announced there would be an internal party discussion on security, leading to the publication of a "national pact" on the subject on October 2.

Party heavyweight François Rebsamen, senator and mayor in Dijon, succinctly said, "The PS [*Parti Socialiste*], it's not the League for the Rights of Man". *Le Monde* commented that Rebsamen's remark showed the PS was not engaged in "moral denunciation" of Sarkozy's policies, but rather in "a critique of the inefficiency of current policies".

Such opinions are widely shared within the PS leadership. Lionel Jospin, Socialist Party prime minister (1997-2002) under former Socialist Party French President François Mitterrand, complained in *Le Monde* August 23 that "the government is not increasing resources for fighting delinquency: they are reducing them. Over the last 3 years, it has cut 9,000 gendarme and police posts while, under my government, apart from 20,000 security auxiliaries, the numbers of policemen alone increased by 5,000".

Ségolène Royal, recalling her policies during her election campaign as PS presidential candidate in 2007, where she vied with Sarkozy on law-and-order, has reiterated her call for "lasting law-and-order and a just order" and for the army to take delinquent youth in hand. *Le Parisien-Aujourd'hui en France* quotes her statement, "Instead of shutting down regiments as the government is doing at present, we must rethink these places for education and supervision so as to get youth back on the rails".

In an interview in *Libération* August 27, she declared, "It is wrong to think that the issue of law-and-order is right-wing...law-and-order is part of the social question,

since those who suffer from disorder daily, in the neighbourhoods, on public transport, at school, are also those who suffer from economic and social insecurity”.

The PS is attempting to appeal to mass hostility to Sarkozy’s policies—whose similarities to the policies of the pro-Nazi Vichy government during World War II have been widely noted—while advancing their own law-and-order prescriptions. The deportations to the death camps of thousands of Jews was preceded by the revocation of the nationality of 15,000 naturalized French citizens including 7,000 Jews. Many political opponents of the Vichy regime, including General Charles de Gaulle, also had their citizenship revoked.

Some critics of Sarkozy’s plans have claimed that it would be impossible to legislate the revocation of the citizenship of delinquent naturalised immigrants because it would contravene the French constitution, which guarantees equality before the law regardless of origin and ethnicity.

However, Eric Besson, the minister for immigration and national identity, a former PS economy spokesman, asserted confidently in *Le Parisien* that “it will suffice to return to the legal situation which obtained up to 1998: to be clear, at the time all those who had committed crimes punishable with a prison sentence of over 5 years, naturalized for less than 10 years, could have their French citizenship revoked”.

In a *Le Monde* interview, the well-known constitutional lawyer Patrick Weil remarked, “The law has forbidden since 1998 the creation of stateless persons by citizenship revocation, which therefore can only be imposed on people with dual nationality. If Nicolas Sarkozy went back on this principle, it would be an unacceptable retrogression which would shock people well beyond our borders”. However, he added, “Let’s not forget that France signed, without nevertheless ratifying them, two international conventions, that of 1961, which opposes statelessness and that of the Council of Europe in 1997, which forbids the creation of statelessness by citizenship revocation”.

That the PS never ratified these conventions while it was in government is a further testament to the right-wing character of its politics. Indeed, its right-wing position on law-and-order is aligning it with right-wing political forces who are also, for tactical reasons, critical of Sarkozy.

Le Monde’s August 25 editorial, commenting on criticism of Sarkozy in the UMP, observed, “The rupture within the right seems to have been consummated”. It noted that there were grounds for the formation of “a sort of ‘everything but Sarkozy’ movement beyond the right-left lines”.

Several figures of the right, including three prime ministers who served under former Gaullist President Jacques Chirac have distanced themselves from Sarkozy’s Grenoble proposals: Alain Juppé, Jean-Pierre Raffarin, and Dominique de Villepin. They have criticised Sarkozy’s measures for being too reminiscent of France’s fascist past and harmful not only to social order but also to France’s international standing.

In an opinion piece in *Le Monde*, Villepin described Sarkozy’s Grenoble speech as “a stain on the flag of France” and an “indignity” for “the country of the rights of man”. He also expressed concern for France’s governance because “the rupture between the summit of the state and the nation is developing”. He called for “a gathering of forces” and organising “a republican alternative”.

The Pope and several French Catholic dignitaries have also criticised Sarkozy, particularly for the Roma deportations and the dismantling of their camps.

Despite its criticisms of Sarkozy’s measures, the PS is not waging an all-out struggle against Sarkozy’s measures, but reflecting the political ambitions of other sections of the ruling class also committed to right-wing policies. As Patrick Weil commented in his *Le Monde* interview, “The impeachment of the president of the Republic also exists, but nobody is making use of it to ask for the departure of Nicolas Sarkozy”.



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