

French bourgeois “left” calls for army occupation of Paris suburb

Antoine Lerougetel
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French bourgeois “left” parties have seized on a recent gang-related shooting north of Paris outside a primary school to call for army intervention in French cities. Poverty and social tensions in France’s suburbs have led to a number of anti-police riots, notably the mass riots of 2005 that started after the electrocution of two youths fleeing police in the Paris suburb of Clichy-sous-Bois.

On June 1 in the north Paris suburb of Sevran, a young man suffered a bullet wound, and a primary school class was terrorised by a stray bullet that had entered the room from shooting outside. The incident followed a series of shoot-outs between rival drug gangs.

The next day the Green Party mayor of Sevran—Stéphane Gatignon, a former member of the Communist Party (PCF)—appealed to the government to call in the army and occupy the neighbourhood as a “peace-keeping force.”

Gatignon asked the minister of the interior to consider “in some neighbourhoods” a 24 hours a day army presence with the function of a “peace-keeping force ... so as to stop the tit-for-tat fights and avoid the risk of stray bullets and tragedies.”

He received the immediate support of Ségolène Royal, the defeated candidate of the big-business Socialist Party in the 2007 presidential elections, won by the incumbent conservative President Nicolas Sarkozy. She declared last Sunday on radio France Inter: “The mayor is asking for the intervention of the army, he is perfectly right to do so.”

She sought to outflank Sarkozy on the right: “We see an interior minister ... who has got rid of thousands of police posts. ...When I’m president of the Republic I will tolerate no no-go areas.” She added: “Sarkozy is in power, he must continue to act, but nothing’s

happening. ... On the issue of law-and-order we’ve never seen such a terrible fiasco.”

Royal is campaigning to obtain the PS nomination again in the forthcoming 2012 presidential election on the same themes as she did in the 2007 election campaign. With the PS, she vied with Sarkozy as the most repressive law-and-order and patriotic candidate calling for the army to take delinquent youth in charge. She also insisted on having the national anthem, the *Marseillaise*, played at the end of every campaign meeting.

The comments of Gatignon and Royal were the occasion for various PS politicians to issue more calls for police spending and law-and-order measures. This reflects great nervousness in the ruling class and the state amid rising mass resistance to state austerity programmes dictated by the financial aristocracy.

François Hollande, former first secretary of the PS and also seeking the nomination as PS presidential candidate, said he understood the “distress” of the mayor of Sevran but that he did not support the use of the army for policing. However, he told AFP: “First of all the police must intervene regularly. Secondly there must be a policy of eradicating gangs and drug-dealing.”

Though Sarkozy has carried out a massive escalation of police powers, Hollande claimed Sarkozy had “visibly abdicated” in the domain of law-and-order.

Jean-Jacques Urvoas, PS national secretary for law-and-order said he opposed a military intervention but proposed a greater investment in policing and judicial procedures.

François Asensi, the PCF deputy for the constituency, accompanied Interior Minister Claude Guéant on Friday on a visit to the council estate, la cité Montceleux, where the gunfire took place. He made no

reference to the army but called for “police to have the suitable means for it to act to dismantle the mafia drug networks.” He also called for the installation of surveillance cameras.

These comments make clear that there is unanimous support in the political establishment for a major escalation of police repression against the working class. It should be noted that the social-democratic governments of George Papandreou in Greece and Luis Zapatero in Spain have already resorted to the army to force striking truckers and air traffic controllers, respectively, back to work.

Notably absent from the statements of the PS and the PCF is any reference to the abysmal conditions in the suburbs. The austerity policies the PS government of President François Mitterrand and Prime Minister Pierre Mauroy, initiated in 1983, continue in greatly harsher form today. Three decades of neglect by left and right governments have meant that the run-down urban council estates have a youth unemployment rate of 40 percent within the already disastrous overall rate of over 20 percent for youth under 25.

In the autumn of 2005, the ruling class imposed a three-month state of emergency initiated by President Jacques Chirac with the support of all bourgeois “left” parties. This included the LCR, forerunner of the NPA of Olivier Besancenot, which refused to call for the withdrawal of the riot police from the estates (See, “France: ‘far-left’ LCR refuses to take a stand on police repression”). The PS mayor of Noisy-le-Grand called for the intervention of the army at the time.

The ruling UMP refused to deploy the army at Gatignon’s request. Guéant said: “In a democratic state, it is the job of the republican police, under the control of the judiciary, to re-establish law and order.” However, he added that “the struggle will be pitiless against the criminals.”

UMP member Eric Raoult, who sat in the parliamentary commission which prepared the law banning the burqa, replied to the Green-PS-PCF onslaught: “In a democracy it is the police’s job to maintain order, not the army.” He accused Gatignon of being irresponsible and of “playing with fire” with statements “worthy of the far right.”

Marine Le Pen, the leader of the neo-fascist National Front, seized on the PS’s right-wing campaign to try to legitimize her own anti-democratic ravings. She

expressed sympathy for Gatignon, saying he was “right to compare what his city has become to Chicago”—that is, when it was the home city of gangster Al Capone during the 1920s.

She called for mass imprisonments, saying: “In France there are ... 20,000 people to be put in prison. There are 50,000 prison places in France. ...There should be 90,000.”

She described Sevrans as “the symbol of the terrible failure of Sarkozism, a policy of talk but no action. ...The hooligans and dealers ... have nothing to fear from the likes of Nicolas Sarkozy and Claude Guéant.” She complained that the police have lost 19,000 posts since 2006.

As if on cue, a report drawn up by UMP deputy Eric Ciotti for Sarkozy, published Tuesday, recommends a crash programme of prison building to reach 80,000 places by 2018, to allow for longer sentences. It also proposes “public service” (*service civique*) for juvenile offenders.



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