

# French government prepares repression against workers

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The French Socialist Party government of President François Hollande has ordered the mobilisation of the secret services and police to carry out surveillance of workers fighting mass unemployment and factory closures.

The French minister of the interior, Manuel Valls, revealed on Tuesday that his political police are fully mobilized to spy on the growing revolt of workers at factories slated for layoffs or closure. He said this was necessary due to the risk of “social implosions or explosions.”

Interviewed on BFM TV, he added that “the social anger is there, with the consequences of the economic and financial crisis, unemployment, poverty, layoffs. It has been there for years.”

The SDIG police intelligence service received an order on January 30 to “closely” follow developments at troubled companies where labour unrest could break out. The order called for police to monitor plans for labour actions and watch out for “threats to production in the event of a radicalisation of the conflict.” It noted, “In an economic downturn ... it is important to closely monitor the situation in vulnerable companies or sectors.”

Valls has given instructions for the police to monitor companies where workers are in struggle to keep their jobs, such as PSA Peugeot-Citroën, Renault, Goodyear, the Petroplus refinery and the ArcelorMittal Florange steel plant. He clearly recognizes the possibility of such struggles escaping the control of the trade union bureaucracy, which has discredited itself by systematically betraying struggles against government austerity programs. Valls noted that there were fewer organised industrial disputes, but greater danger of “social explosions.”

The French police do not limit themselves to

observing protesting workers. They have also moved violently against them.

On Wednesday, over 1,500 workers from the European steel plants of ArcelorMittal converged on the European parliament in Strasbourg to protest against mill closures in Liège (Belgium), Schifflange (Luxemburg) and Florange (France). Their union leaders had an appointment with the president of the parliament, Martin Schulz.

The 23 coaches from Belgium were stopped at a motorway rest stop nine kilometres from Strasbourg. The vehicles and passengers were thoroughly searched. They had to wait to be escorted to their destination by the gendarmes and arrived more than two hours late. A worker from Liège commented, “They treat us like bandits.”

Two coachloads of workers from Florange were subjected to the same treatment. The searches were ordered by the public prosecutor because of violence in Belgium on January 29, when five policemen were injured.

When the police prevented the workers from approaching the European parliament, the workers shouted, “Nobody’s French here. We’re all steelworkers.” Bottled up by riot police between four highways 300 metres from the building, they were unable to march or be heard.

Angry workers who tried to force their way through were repulsed with tear gas. They responded with eggs, bottles, blocks of stone and anything else they could lay hands on. A 25-year-old Belgian steelworker, John David, lost an eye. There were three arrests.

Workers at the Renault plant at Flins, Paris have experienced the increased police harassment ordered by Valls. Ali Kaya, a General Confederation of Labour (CGT) representative, remarked that “there are more

and more police present in unmarked cars ... the police have contacted the trade union reps.”

CGT General Secretary Bernard Thibault said this type of police presence at sensitive plants should be avoided, as it would be seen as “provocation”. Mickaël Wamen, CGT leader at Goodyear in Amiens, described the political police’s presence as aiming “to criminalize our action.”

Such timid verbal protests by the CGT are meaningless, since the union has given no support to workers engaged in struggles who have come under police attack. A particularly shameful example was the complicity of the CGT in the breaking of the oil refinery strike at the height of the movement to defend pension rights in 2010.

At the PSA Aulnay car plant in Paris, 400 workers have been on strike for over three weeks, halting all production in an effort to compel the company to enter into “serious negotiations” on financial compensation and redeployment after closure.

Strikers are being intimidated by the company, with four workers facing dismissal—one of them a mother of two young children. The company reported eight workers to the police for an alleged assault on a bailiff in the factory.

An army of private security guards is stationed around the factory to prevent solidarity action. Last week, hundreds of riot police prevented Aulnay workers from picketing the PSA Poissy factory for support.

Manuel Valls will be no less ruthless in dealing with French workers than he has been in repressing undocumented immigrant workers, 38,000 of whom were deported in 2012—a record far surpassing that of former President Nicolas Sarkozy. The Socialist Party government is outdoing the reactionary policies of the Sarkozy government in all spheres.



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