

Socialist Party officials call for drone patrols inside France

Pierre Mabut, Alex Lantier
3 October 2013

Officials of France's ruling Socialist Party (PS) in Marseille, France's second-biggest city, are calling for the deployment of drones to police the city. This measure, ostensibly taken in order to combat rising drug trafficking and activity by organized crime, is part of the PS' broader campaign to militarize French law enforcement and make right-wing, law-and-order appeals.

Marseille, a port city of over 1 million people, faces 13.2 percent unemployment and has the lowest level of academic diplomas in France.

The Bouches-du-Rhône departmental chief of police, Préfet Jean-Paul Bonnetain, first raised the possibility of deploying drones at a September 9 round table on crime, focusing on drug-related crime in the impoverished northern districts of the city. His staff explained that drones would be useful for "certain investigations that require long-term surveillance and in the unusual topographical settings of Marseille neighbourhoods."

A contender to become the PS candidate to be Marseille mayor, Eugène Caselli, immediately seized on the proposal, however. "I ask the state to make Marseille a real laboratory against crime, a laboratory with new technical means. Now, we have drones, and we are going to use them," he said.

He provocatively compared the situation in France to that in Mexico, where a civil war between major drug gangs and their supporters in the state apparatus has claimed upwards of 60,000 victims. "It's absolutely serious, furthermore, it is done in Mexico City," he wrote in the regional daily *La Provence*, justifying his plans to deploy drones in France.

Jean-Noël Guérini, the PS president of the Bouches-du-Rhône (which includes Marseille) has approved the project and is reportedly willing to invest €1 million in

it. Guérini is currently being investigated for influence-peddling and criminal conspiracy.

The proposal to police the people of Marseille with drones is part of a broader campaign by the PS for the militarisation of French society. PS Senator Samia Ghali has already called for the army to intervene in Marseille, ostensibly to fight crime.

Likewise, the PS president of the Poitou-Charente region and 2007 presidential candidate, Ségolène Royal, came out in favour of deploying the army inside France last month. "Why not imagine co-operation between the police and the army to seize assault weapons" used in gangland killings, she asked.

More broadly, the militarisation of French society has proceeded apace since the introduction of "Vigipirate" counter-terrorism measures in 1991, and especially since a PS government joined the 2001 US-led intervention in Afghanistan in 2001. Sociologist Mathieu Rigouste described "Vigipirate" as "an intensification of the militarisation of urban surveillance" and the "use of the army in a policing capacity." For years, there have been constant military patrols at French transit centres.

Calls for army intervention by the PS politicians in working class neighbourhoods are an extension of this so-called "war on terror."

While the latest deployment of drones is to be presented as a measure aimed at the drug trade, or against terrorism, the principal target of the militarisation of French cities is the working class, particularly youth in France's impoverished suburbs. The ruling elite is painfully conscious of rising popular opposition to PS President François Hollande's policies of austerity and war.

The extreme rightward drift of the PS to repression and military aggression has found clearest expression

internationally, such as in President Hollande’s drive to war for regime change in Syria. Now, however, the French ruling class is seeking to militarize not only its foreign policy, but class relations at home, as well.

Twice in the last decade, in 2005 and 2007, the bourgeoisie was stunned and its police forces overwhelmed by mass riots of suburban youth—to which they responded by imposing emergency law, kangaroo courts, and police repression.

Drones’ high-tech surveillance capacities would be invaluable to police as they attempted to identify and target youth in such spontaneous eruptions of popular anger. Above all, however, drones are directed at political opposition in the working class, as class tensions rise to unprecedented levels after five years of profound global economic crisis and constant austerity measures, by governments of both the right and the bourgeois “left.”

All the social concessions made to the working class in an earlier period are being torn apart, under conditions where the ruling elite’s reactionary policies meet no challenge from the existing political parties, which are all completely alienated from the working class. Indeed, it is the bourgeois “left” PS and the pseudo-left forces that supported it, such as the French Communist Party or the New Anti-capitalist Party, that now play the lead role in arranging for the intensified policing of the people.

The decision to cease using military technology and military units for domestic policing, in particular, was a concession made by the ruling class only in response to the October Revolution of 1917.

History professor Jean-Marc Berlière recently gave an interview in *Le Monde*, recalling that between the bloody crushing of the Paris Commune in 1871 and World War I in 1914-1918, the bourgeoisie routinely used the army for internal policing, particularly to crush strikes.

He noted, “Law-and-order missions were unpopular, the army received punches, insults, and spittle. The massacres that regularly occurred—in Fourmies, Narbonne, etc.—seriously blackened its image, which was already largely compromised by its intervention in strikes on the side of the employers. Given the international context and the campaign for ‘revenge’ against Germany, opposition to militarism driven by the unpopularity of army missions to restore order

became a serious concern.”

Amid deep opposition to capitalism and war in the working class after the useless slaughter of millions in World War I—which found highest expression in the Bolshevik Revolution and the coming to power of the working class in the USSR—the ruling class ceased using the army for domestic policing, setting up a mobile gendarmerie instead. It no longer felt it could rely on the army to fire on the workers, Berlière said: “The political risk was too great—what would the attitude of the soldiers be?”

Such calculations are, however, entirely alien to the chauvinist political establishment of today, which ranges from the PS’ law-and-order devotees such as Interior Minister Manuel Valls to the neo-fascist forces of Marine Le Pen’s National Front (FN). The bourgeoisie’s moves to deploy automated military technology against the population are a warning to the working class. In the coming wave of social struggle, it will confront a ruling class that is preparing for mass repression of popular opposition.



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