

Anti-terror law passed by the French Senate attacks democratic rights

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The Senate has adopted the anti-terror law proposed by the Socialist Party (PS), depriving the population of the right to leave France freely. This law, which strengthens the state police apparatus, represents a grave attack on democratic rights.

The text will have its final reading in the National Assembly on October 29, and then in the Senate on November 4.

The bill will enable the government to ban French citizens from leaving the country if there are “serious reasons to believe” that they are going abroad with the aim of “participating in terrorist activities, war crimes or crimes against humanity,” or if the authorities suspect that they are going to the theatre of operations of terrorist groups under conditions liable to lead them to endanger public security on their return to France.

Once the decision is taken, the person’s passport would be confiscated and they would not be able to leave the country.

The law also aims to allow the blocking by the state, without the prior agreement of a judge, of Internet sites which the authorities accuse of “advocating terrorism.” The deputies and senators are still working on specifying punishments for the crimes of “inciting terrorism” and “advocating terrorism.” According to AFP, the current version of the bill would propose five years imprisonment and a €75,000 fine, raised to seven years and €100,000 in fines if the crimes were committed online.

These measures pose grave danger to freedom of speech. The term terrorism is very vague and subject to political manipulation; it is applied by bourgeois politicians to all sorts of activities and forms of political expression, many of which have nothing to do with the activities of terrorist networks such as Al Qaeda. The state is arming itself not only to fight terrorism, but,

beyond that, revolutionary or oppositional politics.

Le Monde reports that Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve slipped an amendment into the anti-terror bill: “It’s about the ability to ban a European Union citizen from entry into France, in spite of the sacrosanct freedom of movement, if the person represents ‘a threat’ to public security. Not necessarily a terrorist threat—the word is not even used. The formulation is so broad that associations are asking if the text is not aimed especially at the Roma. No sooner deported, they come back. With this law, they could be banned from entry.”

The amendment is illegal and contrary the Schengen agreement. It will facilitate the reactionary persecution of the Roma ethnicity, a flagship measure of the government of President François Hollande, which thereby appeals to the most backward layers of society.

The amendment is above all a remarkable attack on democratic rights. It opens the way not only to the persecution of the Roma, but also to the arbitrary closing off of the country to any foreigner considered undesirable by the police or the government.

This reactionary and hypocritical law was hastily drawn up by the government to stop French youth from leaving to fight in jihadist groups in Syria—even though Paris has relied on jihadist groups such as Al Nusra to wage a proxy war against the regime of Bashar Al-Assad. It is part of a wider programme of surveillance, intimidation and of repression against any opposition in France to the policies of the state.

Izza Leghtas, a Human Rights Watch researcher, stresses the advanced stage of preparations for a police state in France: “The French government already has very extensive powers to fight terrorism... In order to prevent injustices, French legislators should reject new measures which would further increase these powers.”

Already in 2013, the government had voted the military appropriations law which essentially granted French authorities powers comparable to those of their counterparts in the US National Security Agency. This followed Edward Snowden's revelations about the mass illegal eavesdropping and collection of electronic data by the NSA. France was carrying out similar operations, but the 2013 law established a pseudo-legal framework for electronic spying and extended the powers of the French intelligence services.

The anti-terror law is a massive attack on democratic rights. It reflects the deep decay of bourgeois democracy in France, demonstrated internationally in the events in Ferguson, Missouri in the US, where the police armed with military-grade weapons took the town hostage.

The Hollande government is carrying out an unpopular policy of austerity and imperialist war, which is incompatible with democratic rights. It is thus driven to attack democratic rights in order to intimidate, and if need be to strangle opposition by strengthening the repressive powers of the state.

During the oil strike against pension cuts in 2010, the government of former president Nicolas Sarkozy sent riot police to clear the pickets at the refineries and oil depots and crush the strike. With the military appropriations and anti-terror laws, the state is providing itself with further powers to spy on, and if need be repress, the entire French population.

The anti-terror law must be a warning to the working class. It shows once again the reactionary character of the PS government, which is preparing repressive policies and trying to mobilize social forces that will be violently hostile to the working class.

Responsibility for these police state measures falls on the pseudo-left parties. In 2012, the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA), Lutte Ouvrière (LO—Workers Struggle) and the Left Front all called for a vote for Hollande in the second round of the presidential elections, while announcing that the PS would carry out reactionary policies. These parties have supported the PS's pro-war policies and do all in their power to prevent a political struggle by the working class against Hollande.

Contemptuous of democratic rights, these organisations have kept quiet about the revelations of spying on populations by the NSA and they continue to do so now about the government's anti-democratic

laws.



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