

French government escalates repression of protests against labor law

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The French Socialist Party (PS) government of Prime Minister Manuel Valls and President François Hollande is escalating the repression of protests against its regressive Labor Law. It launched a series of crackdowns against youth protests targeting the law starting in March, and the government has engaged provocations, pre-emptive arrests and other police-state measures against the protests. The PS forced the bill into law by invoking the emergency article 49.3 of the French constitution.

The imposition of the law has not stopped the strikes and demonstrations against it. Fully 75 percent of the population oppose the law, and a poll showed that 54 percent of the French people want protests against the illegitimate law to continue, even though it has technically been passed. With anger amongst youth and workers still growing, even the union bureaucracies, who work closely with the PS, were forced to call two national days of action against the law. These will take place today and Thursday.

The PS's reaction has been to denounce protesters as enemies of the state, for daring to continue to protest, and launch extraordinary crackdowns against them. Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve claimed, "The security forces face extremely violent groups who are not there to express their demands but to cause trouble, to destroy and to express hatred of the state... It is intolerable and it will not be tolerated."

Cazeneuve revealed that police had arrested 1,300 people since the demonstrations began and held 819 people in custody. Fifty-one have been convicted in kangaroo courts. Cazeneuve commented, "Fifty-one people were convicted, often with harsh sentences. There will be more summary trials in the courts and, I say this here in Rennes, our resolve will be total."

In fact, the paramilitary police are well known for

their violent behavior. They wear full body armour, make vicious baton charges on demonstrators, and shoot rubber bullets, flash-balls and tear gas canisters.

One demonstrator, a 20 year-old geography student, recently lost his eye when a police officer shot him in the eye with a flash-ball just two weeks ago. Many demonstrators are hospitalised after such police charges. Less than two years ago, another student, Remi Fraisse, was killed by a gendarme firing a "defence grenade" that hit him in a demonstration near Nantes.

When over 700 youth tried to organise a demonstration again police violence in Rennes last Saturday, the demonstration was banned under the terms of the state of emergency. The whole town was locked down, and police who had received reinforcements surrounded the demonstration and dispersed youth with tear gas and fired at them with "defensive balls."

Before they were dispersed the youth chanted "The police mutilate, the police assassinate". One of them showed an AFP journalist with a mark on his hip where a flash-ball had hit him and said, "They're not trying to frighten us; they're trying to hurt us."

The escalating opposition to austerity across Europe has led to an explosion of class tensions and, in France, the emergence of a crisis of rule. Deeply rooted popular opposition to the PS's destruction of basic social rights is colliding with the bourgeoisie's determination to place the full burden of the capitalist crisis on the backs of the workers.

The PS, which has for decades dominated what passed for "left" politics in France, is systematically advancing a socially counterrevolutionary program. Since coming to power in 2012, Hollande has pushed through enormous austerity attacks, including tens of

billions of euros in budget cuts, the Macron deregulation law in 2015, and now the El Khomri law, to destroy rights workers have had for decades.

Hollande is at the head of an extremely weak and reactionary government. He has survived politically until now only due to the opposition of the trade union bureaucracies and their political allies in the #UpAllNight movement to a broader struggle to bring down the PS government. General Confederation of Labour (CGT) leader Philippe Martinez publicly mocked protesters' demands for a general strike.

To try to crush popular opposition to its agenda, the PS is employing nakedly authoritarian methods.

Reports in the press and on activist web sites state that dozens of people are being pre-emptively arrested by police under the terms of the state of emergency in France as they set off to join protests against the El Khomri law. Two people in the Belleville area of Paris were stopped by police and saw in the policemen's affairs lists of mugshots, including theirs. They were taken to the police station until the end of the demonstration.

Police have also arrested an 18-year-old and have charged him with attempted murder of a police officer during a demonstration last May 3rd. The police claim to have identified the youth from CCTV footage of the demonstration. However the youth has denied the charge.

Hollande has all but accused the protesters of collaborating with terrorism, stating that violence by demonstrators was diverting security forces from "protecting people from the terrorist threat which remains at a particularly high level."

In reality, it is now crystal clear that Hollande's state of emergency is being used primarily against domestic social opposition to the PS's regressive policies. The November 13 terror attacks in Paris, carried out by Islamist networks that continue to enjoy the French state's tacit support as part of the NATO war for regime change in Syria, were only a pretext for imposing a state of emergency whose target is the social opposition of the workers and youth.



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