# France creates National Guard targeting the working class

**Anthony Torres**
**17 October 2016**

Adopting the neo-fascist National Front's (FN) proposal to create a National Guard, which was officially validated by French President François Hollande on Wednesday, the ruling Socialist Party (PS) is preparing for large-scale military operations inside France. The large number of reservists in such a National Guard shows that it is not intended to attack small groups of terrorists during terror attacks in France. Rather, it aims to repress social protests and strikes.

The PS proposal would turn the 63,000 men of the existing military reserve into a unit of 84,000 men and women. This would create a force posture allowing it to deploy 9,250 troops across France, instead of the current 5,500. The unit could also participate in foreign wars, like the US National Guard, which participated in the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan.

According to a Senate report by Gisèle Jourda (PS) and Jean-Marie Bockel (Union of Democrats and Independents), the National Guard would aid the army in large-scale operations inside France: "If it becomes stronger, better structured, more numerous, with a territorial spread that anchors it on the entire territory of France, including areas currently deserted by the military, the military reserve could be an effective National Guard. It would give the active army operational assistance on the level required by the new needs of our territory."

The National Guard is to be formed of volunteers "with or without previous military experience," as well as former soldiers who have left the army less than five years ago. Its budget will increase from €211 million for the current reserve to €311 million.

Hollande is forming the National Guard after imposing a state of emergency, ostensibly over a series of attacks by members of the Islamist militias being mobilized by the NATO countries, including France, for the war in Syria. This war, which now threatens to escalate into an open conflict between Russia and NATO, as well as Hollande's unpopular austerity measures such as the PS labor law, have brought social tensions in France to unprecedented heights.

Hollande, who has repeatedly invited FN leader Marine Le Pen to the Elysée presidential palace to promote the neo-fascist party, has yet again taken an element of the FN's program to accelerate the construction of a police state. He had already tried this year to inscribe the principle of deprivation of nationality, associated to the Nazi-collaborationist Vichy regime, in France's constitution.

When she proposed to create a National Guard in 2014, Le Pen had in mind not only external enemies (raising the military budget and restoring universal military service), but also the interior enemy, that is, the working class. She said: "We will ensure and prioritize the defense of the national territory … in particular thanks to the creation of a National Guard of 50,000 reservists, men and women, who can be mobilized on short notice, less than 24 hours."

What the French ruling elite fears is not terrorism—which is in fact an instrument to intensify its exterior military interventions and justify reinforcing its internal repressive powers—but opposition in the working class to its policies of austerity and war.

France is creating its National Guard amid explosive military and social tensions across Europe. In this context, the bourgeoisie is resorting in numerous countries to the construction of paramilitary militias more or less directly tied to far right forces. In Ukraine, in Poland, in the Czech Republic, and beyond, the ruling elites are pressing ahead with the construction of paramilitary units that are nationalist, or even explicitly

© World Socialist Web Site

pro-Nazi.

In Ukraine, the US-backed National Guard, which recruits fascist and neo-Nazi volunteers, emerged from the NATO-backed putsch in Kiev in 2014. The "Azov" battalion, which has over 1,000 soldiers, was formed and led by neo-Nazi leader Andriy Biletsky. It deploys banners marked with a modified swastika, copied from SS units during World War II, and helped crush opposition to the far-right regime in Kiev in Russian-speaking eastern Ukraine.

The French press has avoided raising the Ukrainian, Polish, or Czech militias while discussing the French National Guard. However, an examination of the other national guards that it cited shows that internal repression is at the heart of the preoccupations of the French ruling class. The National Guard in the United States deploys troops against urban riots and mass protests against police violence.

In the context of the greatest economic and military crisis since the 1930s, the forms of political life more and more resemble those analyzed by Leon Trotsky and the Fourth International (FI) at its foundation in 1938. They warned that, amid extreme class tensions, the police and the army were no longer able to carry out the repression that was necessary to the bourgeoisie. The ruling class therefore turned to the construction of more or less legal paramilitary units.

The *Transitional Program* that founded the FI explained: "The bourgeoisie is nowhere satisfied with the official police and army. In the United States even during 'peaceful' times the bourgeoisie maintains militarized battalions of scabs and privately armed thugs in factories. To this must now be added the various groups of American Nazis. The French bourgeoisie at the first approach of danger mobilized semi-legal and illegal fascist detachments, including such as are in the army. ... The bourgeoisie keeps itself most accurately informed about the fact that in the present epoch the class struggle irresistibly tends to transform itself into civil war. The examples of Italy, Germany, Austria, Spain and other countries taught considerably more to the magnates and lackeys of capital than to the official leaders of the proletariat."

As in the 1930s, the working class is the only social base for democracy in France and worldwide. Deep opposition exists among workers to the building of an authoritarian state. But the only way to prevent the installation of such a regime is the political mobilization of the workers against war and austerity, and for the defense of democratic rights. Today, all the different parties of the bourgeoisie are seeking in one or another way to reinforce state repression.

The indefinitely-extended state of emergency installed by the PS has exposed the limits of the capacity of the existing repressive forces to crush opposition from workers and youth. During this year's strikes against the labor law, the FN-linked Alliance police trade union organized protests, backed by the PS and the Stalinist General Confederation of Labor, to express their "fatigue," their anger at "anti-cop sentiment," and to demand more funding and resources.

The profound instability of the political and social situation and the possibility of civil war are widely discussed inside French intelligence services. French domestic intelligence chief Patrick Calvar said, "We are on the verge of civil war. We must therefore anticipate and block any groups that might at one moment or another set off confrontations between communities."

These are the political conditions that are pushing the PS to supplement the forces of the army, the *gendarmerie*, and the police with the new National Guard.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**wsws.org/contact**


© World Socialist Web Site