

# Police stage right-wing, law and order protest in France

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After a protest on the Champs-Élysées in Paris on the night of October 17-18 by around 500 policemen, in explicit defiance of orders from the police hierarchy, new night protests have taken place across France. Policemen are demanding increased police budgets and police powers, and opposing threats of sanctions from police hierarchy and the Socialist Party (PS) government.

The Champs-Élysées protest was organized to demand more financial resources and personnel. Its organisers invoked an October 8 incident, where two policemen were wounded when a Molotov cocktail was thrown at a police car in the Viry-Châtillon area south of Paris.

The next day, the car of the general director of the national police, Jean-Marc Falcone, was targeted in a hostile protest by several hundred policemen in Evry. Other protests by uniformed policemen have taken place in Marseille, Lyon, Nice, Bordeaux and numerous smaller cities. There were also calls for the resignation of Falcone and PS Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve.

President François Hollande has announced that he will meet with police trade unions next week at the Elysée presidential palace.

The policemen's decision to protest openly and illegally with their squad cars and while on duty, and to repeat this violation in the face of criticism from the PS government, indicates that a part of the state machine now believes it is a law unto itself.

This is the result of the policies and the political atmosphere created by the PS ever since the January 2015 attacks on *Charlie Hebdo*. Beyond an unprecedented military and police mobilization, the PS orchestrated a media campaign glorifying the police, accompanied by a campaign aimed at France's Muslim

population. The PS effectively sought to make the police apparatus its main social base within French society.

After the November 13 attacks in Paris, the PS further reinforced police powers, setting up an indefinitely-extendable state of emergency in France. In the racist atmosphere incited by PS policy, police forces had free rein to raid thousands of Muslim families and to brutally and systematically attack opposition from workers and youth to austerity measures such as the mass protests against the PS' unpopular labor law.

In a flagrant attack on religious freedom, condemned by a ruling of the State Council, local police in municipalities controlled by the PS arrested Muslim women on the pretext that they were veiled.

In the final analysis, the target of both the so-called “war on terror” and the anti-Muslim campaign carried out under the fraudulent banner of “secularism” is the opposition of the working class to attacks on its social rights.

The police protests, supported by all the major bourgeois parties and the trade unions are a warning to the working class: the only solution to the crisis that the financial aristocracy is considering is dictatorship at home and endless war abroad.

The day after the first protest, Cazeneuve declared that policemen “are demonstrating due to a frustration that I understand, even if I say very clearly that one cannot, as a policeman, protest with police cars and flashing police lights.”

The day after the second protest, he said, “If I agreed that the general inspection service of the national police be involved, it is not to get into a spiral of punishment, but to recall certain principles.” The day before, he had called in a video message for “respect to authority and to the security forces.”

Similar statements were made by bourgeois politicians of all stripes. PS Prime Minister Manuel Valls also insisted that the government would support the police forces, promising to “tirelessly pursue those who target our teachers, our schools, our security forces.”

Christian Jacob, the head of the right-wing Les Républicains (LR) party at the National Assembly, also supported the protests, saying he understood the “frustration” and “despair” of the police.

Philippe Vigier of the Union of Democrats and Independents (UDI) said he believes society “is on the verge of going up in flames.”

For two days, the leaders of the neo-fascist National Front (FN) have also been multiplying calls for “total support” to protesters and demanding the resignation of the police chief, Falcone.

Support for the FN inside the police and inside the army has risen sharply over the last two years. According to a study by the Ceviprof agency of the Institute for Political Sciences, the FN received 51.5 percent of the police vote during the 2015 regional elections, up 30 percent since 2012, and 57 percent of the police vote in 2016.

The Workers Force (FO)-linked police trade union Unité-Police SGP-FO has called for protests on October 26, in a “march of police and citizens anger.”



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