French government creates illegal database on over 60 million citizens

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By setting up a single database centralizing information on the entire French population behind their backs, France's Socialist Party (PS) government is giving the state vast repressive powers. Coming amid the state of emergency, it constitutes a fundamental threat to democratic rights, in particular to opposition within the working class to austerity and war.

The database, named "Secure Electronic Titles" (TES), was decreed into existence on October 30. It centralizes the personal and bio-metric data of all holders of passports or national identity cards. It concerns over 60 million people, that is, virtually the entire French population. The official launch of the database took place last Tuesday in the Yvelines area and will be extended across France at the beginning of 2017.

The database was prepared in violation of the law, behind the backs of the population. It was first proposed in 2011 at the National Assembly, during a debate on a secure national ID card, and sharply criticized by the National Commission on Information-Processing and Liberties (CNIL). While recognizing as "legitimate the use of bio-metric information to identify a person," the CNIL ruled that "bio-metric data must be conserved in an individualized data system."

The new TES replaces and combines a former TES, which contained passport data, and the National Management Database (FNG), which contained ID card data. It also adds data, including a digital photo of the face, fingerprints, eye data, and physical and electronic addresses. These data are conserved for 15 years (for passports) and 20 years (for ID cards).

The TES database violates legal limits on the use of bio-metric data, moreover, since fingerprints and retina scans are indelible and can be used to remotely identify individuals, and not simply authenticate that an individual presenting himself to the state indeed is who he purports to be. In 2012, the Constitutional Council invalidated an attempt to set up a similar database, ruling that such a database would serve not only to authenticate but also to identify individuals.

Thus, by creating the TES database, the PS government of President François Hollande trampled the recommendations of the CNIL and the Constitutional Council's veto in 2012.

Having created the TES by decree, the government will find it easy to modify its functioning to increase its powers, as was the case for the national DNA database. According to Guillaume Desgens-Pasanau, a magistrate and lecturer and the National Conservatory of Arts and Professions (CNAM), "once the database of 60 million people is there, one can easily add a search function, for instance. It is quite easy, as it is regulated via a decree and therefore does not require new legislation."

Beyond the risk that TES data could be pirated, the police, *gendarmerie*, customs and the intelligence services, as well as Interpol, will have access to tools that reinforce pre-existing surveillance infrastructure.

Speaking to Agence France-Presse (AFP), CNIL President Isabelle Falque-Pierrotin described her concerns regarding the TES: "It is very clear that we are not dealing with a database whose ultimate goal is to struggle against identity theft … This large-scale mechanism raises fears that it can be used for other purposes, not today, but in the coming period."

The attacks on democratic rights, the police-state measures, and the pervasive domestic spying set up by the Hollande administration constitute an immense danger for the working class. A government even further to the right than the PS, armed with such powerful surveillance tools, could easily go even further than Hollande in repressing workers' opposition

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to austerity and war.

The creation of the TES database is part of a far broader installation of a police state by Hollande after the November 13 terror attacks, committed by Islamist networks mobilized by the NATO powers in their war for regime change in Syria.

Police repression of protests against the PS' deeply regressive labor law, a few months after the imposition of the state of emergency, exposed the more fundamental objectives of the police state crackdown. Hollande used a vast police deployment to detain hundreds of youth, intimidate high school and university student protesters, and physically crush strikes against his anti-worker policies.

The state of emergency went hand in hand with stepped-up attacks by the PS against Muslims and immigrants, with raids on hundreds of predominantly Muslim families in working class areas.

The collection of physical information as well as data on people's political opinions is aimed at allowing police and intelligence agencies to identify and track existing and potential opponents of state policy. The AGDREF-2 database, which contains bio-metric data, including all ten fingerprints for 7 million non-citizens residing legally or illegally in France, can also be used to identify individuals.

Given the anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim statements from both official and far-right circles, such a database could serve to identify and deport via detention camps immigrants and Muslims—a possibility mooted by far-right journalist Eric Zemmour after the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks.

These are all indications that the TES database is part of a broad construction of a police state in France, aiming to crush working class opposition to the austerity and war policies advanced by the PS. This has been broadly discussed in the ruling class and state circles in the European Union (EU).

Writing for the EU Institute for Security Studies, Thomas Ries, the leader of the Swedish Institute of International Affairs, called for the growing recourse to military means in dealing with social problems: "…the percentage of the population who were poor and frustrated would continue to be very high, the tensions between this world and the world of the rich would continue to increase, with corresponding consequences. Since we will hardly be able to overcome the origin of this problem by 2020, i.e., the functional defects of society, we will have to protect ourselves more strongly."

This points to the deep crisis of capitalist rule, as the ruling class attacks fundamental democratic rights to confront rising social tensions and working class anger against war and social inequality.

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