

French prime minister calls for extension of state of emergency

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In a BBC interview Sunday, French Prime Minister Manuel Valls called for yet another extension of the French state of emergency, until after presidential elections in April-May 2017. Coming just after the election of Donald Trump as US president, Valls' announcement points to the accelerating collapse of democratic forms of rule on both sides of the Atlantic.

As he demanded that the National Assembly approve the fourth extension of the state of emergency since Valls' Socialist Party (PS) imposed it just after the November 13 terror attacks in Paris, Valls gave no indication of when, or whether, the French state of emergency would ever be lifted.

"It would be hard today to end the state of emergency," Valls told the BBC's HARDtalk show. "Especially since we will launch a presidential election in a few weeks with meetings and public gatherings. So we must also protect our democracy."

"Besides," he added, "the mechanism of the state of emergency also grants us the ability to carry out arrests and administrative investigations that are effective. ... So yes, we will probably live for some time with this state of emergency." He cited the July 14 Bastille Day attack in Nice, when an Islamist killed 86 people and wounded 434 by driving a truck through a crowd, as the type of attack the state of emergency was needed to confront.

Valls' arguments for the state of emergency are a reactionary political fraud. The state of emergency is not an anti-terrorist initiative to defend democracy, but a police-state regime targeting the working class above all. It aims to whip up far-right forces, stimulate militarist and anti-Muslim hysteria, and send police to crush rising opposition in the working class to PS austerity policies, like this spring's mass protest movement against the PS' despised labor law.

The fact that Valls does not foresee any end to the state of emergency only underscores that powerful factions in the ruling class intend for the suspension of democratic rights to be permanent.

It is now clear, as even sections of the political establishment have admitted, that the state of emergency does not prevent terror attacks. It clearly proved incapable of preventing the Nice attack, and a parliamentary report this summer overseen by conservative deputy Georges Fenech found that the state of emergency had "limited scope" as an anti-terror measure. In fact, the state of emergency has not cut off terror networks, because they are key tools of French and NATO war policy.

In February 2016—after the vast majority of police actions under the state of emergency had taken place—the National Consultative Commission on Human Rights (CNCDH) published an accounting based on Interior Ministry figures. The CNCDH counted 3,824 searches and seizures, 392 assignments to house arrest, but only 29 investigations of terror-related offenses. These included 23 charges for a vaguely-defined offense of "apologizing for terrorist actions," i.e., verbally supporting Islamist groups, and only six cases sent on to anti-terror prosecutors.

In the meantime, however, thousands of European Muslims are traveling to the Middle East to join Islamist militias that are NATO's main proxies in its war for regime change against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. According to estimates from the Soufan Group, a private intelligence firm, some 1,700 people from France alone have already traveled to join militias in Syria. A flow of fighters on this scale is impossible without the knowledge and complicity of European intelligence agencies.

An examination of the individuals involved in recent

terror attacks in Europe—the *Charlie Hebdo* and November 13 attacks in Paris last year, and the March 22 attack in Brussels this year—clearly illustrates this complicity. The leaders of the terrorist commandos were well known to intelligence agencies, often as high-ranking operatives. Yet they were able to cross borders, access tens of thousands of euros, and acquire weapons without hindrance.

*The Kouachi brothers who carried out the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks were removed from surveillance shortly before they carried out the attack, even though they were in contact with top leaders of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).

*Abdelhamid Abaaoud, the leader of the November 13 terror commando, was allowed to travel across Europe even though he was well known to intelligence services as the public face of the Islamic State (IS) militia's recruiting efforts on social media.

*The March 22 attackers and their targets were identified to Belgian authorities by Turkish, Israeli, and Russian intelligence before the attacks. Nonetheless, they were not stopped, nor was security tightened around their targets. It also emerged after the attack that the location of November 13 accomplice Salah Abdeslam, who was in hiding in Brussels and described in the media as “Europe’s most wanted man” until his capture shortly before the March 22 attack, had been known to Belgian police forces the entire time.

The French political establishment and media have used lies about the Syrian war and the Paris and Brussels bombings to reorient official politics far to the right, in order to continue imposing policies of war and austerity that have no popular base whatsoever.

For nearly two years, the masses have been bombarded with lies, taken from the arsenal of the far right, presenting these attacks not as the outcome of a politically criminal war in Syria, but of Muslim delinquency. The PS used this poisonous atmosphere to divide working people, promote the police and military, ram through billion-euro increases in military spending, and justify repeated police assaults on peaceful demonstrators against its labor law.

It led to attacks on democratic rights that are unprecedented since World War II, such as bans of “burkini” swimwear enforced on French beaches in defiance of court rulings, and Valls’ attempt this summer to ban peaceful protests by workers and youth

against the labor law.

Conditions are emerging for even more bitter class battles in France and across Europe. Amid a constant danger of a NATO-Russia war over Syria, with the right-wing The Republicans (LR) and the neo-fascist National Front (FN) rising in the polls, an even more ferociously right-wing regime could easily come to power in France. It would have at its disposal the juridical and technological infrastructure of a police state, built by the PS, to be mobilized against working class opposition to austerity and war.

The precondition of any victorious struggle against war and to defend workers’ basic social rights is to oppose the reactionary fraud of the French state of emergency.



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