

New French Prime Minister Cazeneuve prolongs state of emergency

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Incoming French Prime Minister Bernard Cazeneuve spoke before the National Assembly and sent remarks to the Senate this week to lay out the policy of his government.

Following the Prime Minister's speech, the National Assembly voted early Wednesday morning to approve a fifth extension of France's state of emergency that Cazeneuve had announced earlier, meaning that basic democratic rights will continue to be suspended in France until July 15, 2017.

Cazeneuve's government will last only five months, until the May 2017 presidential elections, and be the shortest of the Fifth Republic, the constitutional set-up in France created in 1958. He is replacing Manuel Valls, who stepped down last week to run as the Socialist Party (PS) candidate after President François Hollande declined to run due to his deep unpopularity. It was widely expected that a new candidacy by Hollande, whose approval rating is hovering around 4 percent, would lead to the PS' disintegration.

As the political right is expected to win the election, and then continue extending the state of emergency, the PS' extension of the state of emergency under Cazeneuve underscores that the entire ruling elite intends for the state of emergency to be permanent in all but name.

Cazeneuve, who as interior minister was formerly tasked with enforcing the state of emergency, is now set to control the government until May, amid unprecedented political uncertainty, as Donald Trump takes over the US presidency next month.

In his remarks to the National Assembly Tuesday, Cazeneuve laid out an aggressive agenda. Amid reports that the Trump administration plans to boost spending on opposition forces in Syria when it takes office, Cazeneuve denounced Syrian army units fighting

NATO-backed Islamist militias in Aleppo and pledged to faithfully implement Hollande's social cuts.

"I denounce the horror of these massacres and I affirm that those who perpetrated them will have to answer for the crimes they have committed before the international community," he said, claiming that "innumerable atrocities" and "massacres" by the Syrian army were "war crimes or even crimes against humanity."

With conservative The Republicans (LR) presidential candidate François Fillon sitting in the Assembly, Cazeneuve also implicitly criticized Fillon's plans to slash health coverage under Social Security and eliminate 500,000 positions in the public service.

"You can cut without damaging and modernize without destroying," Cazeneuve claimed, adding, "Proposing to eliminate hundreds of thousands of civil service positions in a few months, that simply means putting in question the state's ability to carry out its most elementary missions."

In fact, masses of workers have seen that the hundreds of billions of euros cut from public spending under Hollande and previous conservative administrations have undermined hospitals, schools, and other public services while enormously boosting social inequality. While France's top multibillionaires doubled their wealth or more under Hollande, the main increase in state spending seen by workers and youth was on the military and the police build-up during the state of emergency.

Cazeneuve went on to hail the formation by the PS of the 85,000-strong National Guard, a key demand of the neo-fascist National Front (FN). In a cynical attempt to boost Valls in the elections by posturing as concerned about the youth, Cazeneuve also announced a tiny €80 million program to distribute €335 bonuses to industrial

apprentices under 21 years old.

LR's response to Cazeneuve in the Assembly came from Christian Jacob, who gave voice to the unrestrained greed and anti-Muslim sentiment that dominates the French ruling class. "You are also responsible for the disastrous record of Hollande's debacle," he told Cazeneuve, demanding an end to "absolutely iniquitous taxation" and affirming that France is the product of "a Judeo-Christian civilization." He predicted an even greater defeat for the PS than in the 1993 elections, when it collapsed from 263 to 57 seats in the Assembly.

André Chassaigne spoke for the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF), a decades-long ally of the PS that is now the largest party inside the Left Front of Jean-Luc Mélenchon. He weakly criticized its record under Hollande, while praising Cazeneuve as "someone who is very respectful of the different political outlooks represented in the Assembly."

Cazeneuve's government was approved 305-239 with 10 abstentions in the Assembly, which then proceeded to vote 288-32 early on Wednesday to extend the state of emergency. The state of emergency is also expected to be approved overwhelmingly by the LR-dominated Senate later today.

The fifth prolongation of the state of emergency points to the collapse of French democracy. The 20-month state of emergency will be the longest ever since the state of emergency was created in 1955, amid the mass carnage caused by French repression in the Algerian war for independence. Now, however, based only on a handful of terror attacks carried out by Islamist networks mobilized by the NATO powers themselves in Syria, the PS is effectively imposing a permanent state of emergency that will hand over drastic police-state powers to an LR or FN government.

Earlier this year, the main target of the state of emergency emerged clearly when the PS used it to organize violent police repression of youth and workers' protests against its regressive labour law. Besides mobilizing tens of thousands of security forces during these protests, it also allowed the PS to attempt something never seen since the end of World War II and fascist rule in France: the banning of a legal workers protest called on an issue of labour legislation.

Far more is involved in the French state of emergency than the labour law, however. Another major aim of the

state of emergency is to try to terrorize the population and, if need be, to crush opposition while another major military escalation is being prepared.

As the election of Trump and the PS' bellicose denunciations of the Russian-backed regime in Syria make clear, a major military escalation is in the works. As Cazeneuve threatens to somehow bring Syrian officials to the dock for trial, Trump is threatening to escalate the war in Syria and to renounce the One China policy that underlies relations between China and the United States, and more broadly, the NATO powers.

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