

French government fires bus and rail workers accused of “radicalization”

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Under the cover of “anti-terror” laws introduced by Socialist Party President François Hollande in 2016, the French rail and bus networks have placed their employees under the surveillance of the Interior Ministry. They are seeking to justify firing workers based on nothing more than a suspicion of being politically radicalized.

An article published Saturday by *Le Monde* reports what happened to a Parisian transport worker, speaking under the pseudonym Hocine. Seventeen months ago, a manager summoned Hocine at the end of his shift and informed him that he was suspended from his duties as a bus driver in the Ile-de-France region. A few days later, he received a letter at his parents’ house: “We are obliged to notify you of your dismissal [for a real and serious reason].”

The explanation given was as follows: “You have been investigated by the Interior Ministry resulting in an assessment of incompatibility being rendered against you.”

According to the newspaper, “public transport companies can ask the police to investigate job applicants and employees who wish to change their jobs or whose behavior is concerning.” These so-called “screening” operations aim to determine whether the person’s attitude “gives serious reasons to believe that he or she is likely, in the course of his or her duties, to commit an act seriously prejudicial to public security or order.”

The National Service for Administrative Security Investigations (SNEAS) relies on various files relating to “the prevention of terrorism or breaches of public security and order.” These listings include the names of individuals suspected of religious radicalization or involved in movements designated by the state as extreme-left or extreme-right. The SNEAS gives a

negative or positive opinion without explanation to the employer, who can launch a dismissal procedure against the employee on this basis.

When Hocine asked for clarification, his interlocutor “didn’t know what to say,” the *Le Monde* article noted. As the newspaper pointed out, the SNEAS report included no justification, meaning that the state’s characterization of Hocine as dangerous was made arbitrarily. Hocine denounced the procedure and told the official: “I am not a terrorist, I gave you my criminal record, there is nothing on it.”

One of the lawyers for dismissed workers, Thierry Renard, denounced this arbitrary system, which he said was comparable to “sealed letters,” a practice of the Ancien Régime allowing the kings to imprison their subjects without trial. “My clients cannot defend themselves because they do not know the reasons why they were fired,” Renard said. Under the guise of the fight against terrorism, he added, fundamental freedoms are being violated.

These procedures, which violate fundamental democratic rights, have already targeted dozens of workers in France.

According to a report by deputies Eric Diard (The Republicans, Bouches-du-Rhône) and Eric Poulliat (Republic on the Move, Gironde), the national rail network stated that it had “received just over 20 negative responses from 2,125 job applications, and two negative responses for 300 internal transfers.” By the end of 2018, the Parisian transport operator had sent some 5,800 cases to the interior ministry, resulting in 124 layoff notices (another 134 cases were still under review).

These witch-hunts are a political warning. The establishment of a police state granting immense powers to the police and intelligence agencies is

directed at the most essential democratic and social rights of workers. As social and political opposition grows in the population, the aim is to intimidate the working class by establishing a fascistic regime that would criminalize any opposition deemed a threat to continued social inequality and military-police violence produced by the policies of the ruling class.

The state is clearly working to create a regime where large sections of workers fear losing their jobs if they are suspected of views contrary to the government, on the basis only of anonymous and unsubstantiated denunciations by the police.

Le Monde reports on several cases similar to Hocine's. They have led to legal challenges by the "radicalized" workers. On several occasions, the courts have been forced to acknowledge the lack of evidence against them, as was the case with Marc, a bus driver dismissed on the grounds of being radicalized. The court ordered his reinstatement at the company.

The abusive dismissals at the transport networks underscore the essential fraud of the entire "war on terror." The anti-terrorism laws and the state of emergency were not directed at combating Islamist networks, which France and the other imperialist powers utilized to wage their dirty neo-colonial wars in Libya and Syria. The same Islamist terror networks carried out attacks in France itself with the passive complicity of intelligence agencies, killing hundreds of people.

These attacks have been used as a pretext for the destruction of democratic rights aimed at preparing the violent suppression of opposition to the government's policies in the working class. The police forces violently attacked demonstrations opposing the Socialist Party's labour law, then the railway and university reforms under the Macron administration. The "yellow vest" protests against social inequality have been the target of the largest wave of arrests in metropolitan France since the Nazi occupation during World War II.

Under conditions of an international upsurge of working-class struggle, the Macron administration knows it is isolated and despised. It is seeking to control the views of broad sections of the working class through intimidation and threats with layoffs if their views contradict those of the state. The increasingly openly-assumed goal of the financial aristocracy is to

stifle the rise of anger against social inequality engendered by the capitalist system.

For example, a recent French intelligence strategy document expresses concern about the growing danger of insurrection against the ruling class: "The growing strength of movements and networks of a subversive character constitutes a factor of crisis that is all the more concerning because they are aimed at weakening, and even destroying, the foundations of our democracy and the republican institutions through insurrectional violence."

The collapse of bourgeois democratic norms is the response of the ruling class to the crisis of capitalism and the growth of the class struggle. The struggle to defend democratic rights and against the physical threats and arbitrary dismissals of an increasingly authoritarian regime requires a political struggle of the international working class against Macron and the European Union.



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