

French Parliament Extends State of Emergency amid Rising Protests

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Global Research, May 20, 2016

[World Socialist Web Site](#)

Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [Police State & Civil Rights](#), [Poverty & Social Inequality](#)

Yesterday, for a second time after a similar decision in February, the National Assembly extended the state of emergency decreed by France's Socialist Party (PS) government in the aftermath of the November 13 terror attacks in Paris.

"The terror threat remains at an elevated level, and France as well as the European Union remains a target," said Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve, who opened the parliamentary debate.

The pretext for the extension of the state of emergency for two months beyond its current expiration on May 26 was the 2016 Euro football championships and the Tour de France cycling race, both taking place this summer in France. The prolongation of the state of emergency, wrote *Les Echos*, citing government sources, would allow the state to protect such events and to "ban the presence in all or part of a region of any person who seeks to pose an obstacle, in whatever manner, to the action of the public power."

The pretense that the state of emergency is primarily directed against Islamist terrorism that might disturb sporting events is a political fraud. What has emerged over the last several months is that the state of emergency is not directed at the Islamist terror networks that carried out the November 13 attacks, but at rising opposition of workers and youth to military-police violence and social austerity.

The Brussels attacks showed, however, that the Paris attacks and the state of emergency had not cut the close ties between NATO and Islamist networks, which continued to enjoy official protection in Europe as NATO used them for its war for regime change in Syria. Immediately after the attacks, it emerged that Belgian officials had ignored detailed warnings from Russian, Turkish and Israeli intelligence identifying the attackers and their targets.

The attacks came on the heels of the arrest in Brussels of the alleged mastermind of the November 13 Paris attacks, Salah Abdeslam. It soon emerged, however, that Belgian police had been aware not only of the identity of the March 22 attackers, but also, since December, of Abdeslam's location, throughout the period when the media widely presented him as Europe's "most wanted man."

Above all, however, the last two months have seen the emergence of a mass movement of youth and workers against the labour law of PS Labour Minister Myriam El Khomri, during which the PS has used the state of emergency to impose unprecedented limits on the right to protest. While riot police violently attacked protests, the PS carried out "preventive"

arrests of dozens of protesters, confined others to house arrest, or banned them from going to areas where protests were taking place.

This was a blatant attempt to intimidate and block protests, under conditions where 75 percent of the population opposed El Khomri's regressive law.

Class tensions are rising, and new layers of the workers including truck drivers, refinery workers, transport workers and air traffic controllers have begun strike action and protests. This only makes the PS all the more determined to continue using the full arsenal of repressive measures provided by the state of emergency against the population, well beyond the July 26 deadline.

The PS and one of its leading intelligence specialists in the the parliament, Jean-Jacques Urvoas, are preparing legislation that would effectively make the state of emergency permanent. PS legislator Pascal Popelin, who is overseeing the penal reform bill in the Assembly, said it was "a tool that allows us to get by without the state of emergency."

The penal law reform they are preparing would inscribe into law many of the powers currently granted to the security forces by the state of emergency. These include the ability to detain people without access to a lawyer for four hours during identity checks; to impose house arrests for up to one month on suspicion of terrorism, if police have insufficient evidence to justify placing them under investigation; and broadening police powers on phone and Internet wiretapping as well as night searches.

The PS' imposition of the state of emergency was not a one-time event in response to a particularly horrific terror attack. It was part of a broad build-up of similar state powers of mass spying and arbitrary detention internationally, that have developed with escalating speed since the outbreak of the "war on terror" after the attacks of September 11, 2001, 15 years ago.

The events in France only highlight with particular sharpness that these developments are aimed against the working class and threaten the emergence of dictatorships, even in advanced countries with long democratic traditions. As the PS is staggered by rising popular opposition to its unpopular and regressive social agenda, it is responding—in line with the entire ruling class—by trying to establish a regime that can crush such opposition.

On Wednesday, the PS and the Stalinist General Confederation of Labour (CGT) union both took the unprecedented step of backing protests against "anti-cop hatred" called by a police union close to the neo-fascist National Front (FN), and attended by top FN leaders.

Yesterday, Prime Minister Manuel Valls appeared on RTL radio to denounce strikes and workers' protests against the labour law and make clear that the state did not intend to tolerate such protests. It is moving aggressively against both the right to protest and the right to strike, which are protected by the French constitution.

As truck drivers set up blockades at highways and a number of oil refineries, Valls declared, "We cannot tolerate these blockades," accusing the trade unions of "stoking fears" and spreading "half truths" about the cuts the labour law would impose on overtime pay.

This raises the question of whether, as during the oil refinery strikes of 2010, the government will send in police to physically crush strike pickets and break strikes.

Valls attacked protests against the labour law, saying, "I don't really see what their goal is today. ... If there are delinquents on each demonstration today, though, one must ask about the relevance of some of these protests." He pledged to ban more protesters from demonstrating, adding, "Lists of names will again be decided upon to prevent yet again a certain number of people from going to protests."

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