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French government backs neo-fascist protest against opposition to labor law

By Alex Lantier
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On Wednesday the Alliance police union, which is close to the neo-fascist National Front (FN), called protests on squares across France previously occupied by the #UpAllNight movement, which criticises the Socialist Party's (PS) regressive labour law.

Several top FN leaders attended the protests. On the pretext of opposing “anti-cop hatred,” the protest aimed to intimidate opposition to the labour law, which the vast majority of the population still opposes even after the PS rammed it through the National Assembly without a vote last week. The labor law lays the groundwork for slashing workers’ wages, benefits and working conditions.

This unprecedented far-right protest testifies to the accelerating disintegration of democracy in Europe. Though it was a definitely pro-FN protest, it had not only the organisational and political support of the PS government, but the participation of the Left Front and trade unions close to #UpAllNight, including the General Confederation of Labour (CGT). These forces, terrified of rising working class opposition to austerity across Europe and particularly against their longtime ally, the PS, are aligning themselves with the far right against the workers and youth.

Before the Alliance protest planned for noon on Republic Square in Paris, on-duty paramilitary police set up blockades on avenues leading to the square, which had been abandoned by the organizations that occupied it to set up the #UpAllNight movement. The Paris prefecture blocked access to the square via the subway. The police guards blocked access to the square to everyone

except police, their friends, a few journalists and politicians—principally, though not exclusively, from the FN.

As a few hundred police occupied the square, the paramilitaries guarding it taunted youth who wanted to go onto the square to protest the Alliance demonstration. Under the terms of the state of emergency, the prefecture also banned a counter-demonstration called against police violence, claiming that it posed a “serious risk of grave disturbances to public order.”

Monday, the prefecture also issued a ban on 18 members of an anti-fascist organisation from participating in anti-labour law demonstrations this week. The prefecture did not claim they had attacked police, and indeed they had not been arrested, but it nonetheless banned them from “remaining” in demonstrations, citing special powers under the state of emergency. This follows the “preventive” arrest of dozens of other demonstrators by the PS.

FN legislator Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, the niece of FN leader Marine Le Pen, and a leading FN lawyer, Gilbert Collard, attended the Alliance protest. They refused to take journalists' questions, saying they would “not do PR.” However, Marine Le Pen published a communiqué supporting the demonstration and demanding more emergency powers for police.

The communiqué, titled “The National Front supports police,” declares: “Ending the impunity that too many delinquents enjoy to apply zero-tolerance methods, reinforcing the staff and equipment of our security forces, creating a presumption of self-defense for police—that is the National Front's plan to support our police and thus to restore the authority of the Republic.”

Several leaders or allies of the right-wing The Republicans (LR) or of the Left Front attended the protest on Republic Square alongside the neo-fascists: Eric Ciotti and Geoffrey Didier of LR, the economic nationalist politician Nicolas Dupont-Aignan, and Eric Coquerel, a regional councilor of the Left Party founded by Jean-Luc Mélenchon.

Alliance demonstrations were held in dozens of other cities across France including Lyon, Nice, Strasbourg, Mulhouse, Lille, Calais, Rennes, Montpellier and Caen.

The PS government reacted by applauding all the security forces. President François Hollande began a cabinet meeting yesterday by addressing “a clear message of support to all of the security forces in this difficult context.”

As for Manuel Valls, the prime minister and former interior minister, he issued a statement on Twitter implying that any confrontation with the security forces was a declaration of war on the French nation: “Police and *gendarmes* protect our citizens and institutions every day. Attacking them means attacking all of us.”

The neo-fascist protest went ahead also with the support of CGT President Philippe Martinez. Asked whether he condemned violence against the police forces and if the CGT would join the protest against “anti-cop hatred,” he replied in the affirmative.

“Of course we condemn all violence ... [including] from those who are called delinquents, who are very small in number but who create an incredible amount of damage,” he said. “That is why the CGT police unions will also protest on Wednesday,” he added.

The reactions of the PS, the CGT and the Left Front to the Alliance protests are a serious warning to the workers and youth in France and internationally, which vindicates the WSWS' consistent opposition to all the pseudo left groups operating in the periphery of the PS.

Eight years of global economic crisis and deep austerity have not only devastated European society and impoverished broad layers of workers and youth, but undermined existing political parties. Across Europe, social democratic parties and their political and trade union allies are discredited and hated by masses of people. The mechanisms of “social dialog,” whereby business groups and the trade unions for decades negotiated in order to provide the illusion of consensus around social cuts demanded by big business, are collapsing.

Opposition to austerity, war and anti-democratic law-and-order measures is broadly shared among workers. Nonetheless, the working class faces one main obstacle: it is entering into struggle without revolutionary leadership, under conditions where no party speaks for the working class. The parties that for decades dominated what passed for “left” politics have proved totally hostile to the workers.

In this context, the bourgeoisie, staggered by the political collapse of the PS and Hollande's inability to finish off opposition to the austerity measures it is demanding, is contemplating what alternatives to bourgeois democracy might allow it to impose the economic policies it wants by force. The state of emergency imposed in France after the November 13 attacks in Paris proved to be a trial balloon for a move towards dictatorship aiming to crush social opposition in the working class.

Workers in France face the necessity of launching a political struggle against the PS government not only to oppose war and austerity, but also to defend basic democratic rights. Bourgeois commentators, on their part, are declaring quite openly and provocatively that they are preparing themselves for conditions of civil war and counterinsurgency in France itself.

Writing that a “pre-civil war situation is emerging in France,” *Le Figaro* editorialist Ivan Rioufol blamed this situation on opposition to capitalism, which he equated with Islamism. He deplored “violent opposition to the model of Western society, capitalist and liberal. This rejection is shared both by the radicalised left and political Islam ... Civil war is already in the hearts and minds of the Islamo-leftists and their collaborators, who claim that they are acting in self-defense in the face of a criminal police force.”

Free-market commentator Nicolas Baverez wrote a column in the German paper *Die Welt* declaring that in “2017, France will have to choose between reform or an attempt at revolution, which threatens to go in the direction of the far right.”