

French state of emergency expires in name, but police state remains

Alex Lantier, Kumaran Ira
4 November 2017

On November 1, nearly two years after its imposition after the 13 November 2015 terror attacks in Paris, the French state of emergency formally expired. It was by far the longest time that democratic rights were suspended in France since the state of emergency was created by law and then imposed in 1955, amid the Algerian war for independence against France.

The passage of the November 1 deadline does not, however, signify that the French masses are now secure in the enjoyment of democratic and social rights formally guaranteed by the post-World War II constitution. It does not even signify a return to the conditions that existed before the 2015 terror attacks carried out by the Islamic State (IS) in Paris. Rather, it is ever clearer that France's state of emergency was part of a fundamental political shift internationally by the capitalist class towards dictatorship.

The French state of emergency proved to be the first of a series of escalating attacks on democratic rights by NATO governments, ever more directly targeting popular opposition to war and austerity. Across the Pyrenees, Madrid is imposing Article 155 of the Spanish constitution to suspend Catalonia's elected government and, after the brutal police crackdown on the October 1 Catalan independence referendum, impose direct military-police rule in the province.

As the state of emergency expired in France, US intelligence officials were testifying before the US Congress to demand that social media corporations censor oppositional views, warning in McCarthyite fashion that the Internet was being used as a tool of foreign subversion. "We all must act now on the social media battlefield to quell information rebellions that can quickly lead to violent confrontations and easily transform us into the Divided States of America," said one.

Within France, politicians and the media declare that the state of emergency could be re-imposed at any time.

Interior Minister Gérard Collomb said, "We may have to put it back in place, we will make sure we can handle crisis situations. If things became very dramatic, we could come back to the state of emergency."

Moreover, French President Emmanuel Macron is pushing through an even deeper attack on democratic rights than the state of emergency imposed two years ago. Before the state of emergency expired, he set up a permanent state of emergency in the form of a draconian anti-terror law signed on October 30. It permanently dispenses with basic democratic rights, prolonging the most widely used police powers of the state of emergency. It allows security forces to:

- * Carry out arbitrary searches and seizures in private homes or any area declared a "security zone;"

- * Impose house arrest and electric monitoring of individuals for up to one year at a time;

- * Carry out warrantless identity checks in areas around borders, train stations and airports in which two-thirds of the French population lives;

- * Collect and store all electronic, telephone and email data of anyone police believe could be connected in the present or future to "serious crime."

The law also institutes draconian limitations on freedom of conscience and expression. It allows the state to dismiss public-sector workers whose beliefs it declares to be "incompatible" with their duties. It also allows security forces to close down any place of worship whose "ideas or theories" are deemed to incite terrorism, hatred or discrimination.

Two years after the imposition of the state of emergency, it is untenable to claim that this was simply a "war on terror" reaction to IS attacks such as the 7 January and 13 November 2015 terror atrocities in Paris. Rather, it was the response of the ruling class to a mortal crisis of capitalism. It used these attacks to respond to escalating class tensions after a quarter-century of

imperialist war and social austerity since the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 by making a turn towards dictatorship and the legitimization of neo-fascism.

The main targets of the state of emergency were not the Islamist networks that carried out the 2015 attacks. Rather, it aimed to terrorize working class suburbs in France and popular opposition to ever-deeper assaults by the European Union and the French ruling class on basic social rights.

During the state of emergency, there were over 4,300 extrajudicial searches and seizures, and over 750 people were put under house arrest. Just under 1,000 legal cases were opened, 75 security zones were set up, and 41 people are still under house arrest in France. However, the state of emergency led to only 20 counter-terrorism investigations.

This number pales in comparison to the over 1,700 fighters whom Islamist networks sent from France to Syria, as over 5,000 Europeans in total went to Syria. The vast majority of those passing through these networks long enjoyed tacit official support, as NATO waged war for regime-change in Syria. The forces that carried out the 7 January attack on *Charlie Hebdo* and the November 13 attacks could plan and carry out the attacks not because they escaped detection, but because the networks of which they were a part were protected tools of war policy.

Both attacks were prepared by well-known members or associates of the Buttes-Chaumont group in Paris. This is Al Qaeda's most famous cell in France, founded by veterans of the CIA's covert war in Afghanistan against the USSR in the 1980s. It retains close links to Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and is closely watched by French intelligence. Both the Kouachi brothers who attacked *Charlie Hebdo* and Salim Benghalem, who helped Abdelhamid Abaaoud plan the November 13 attacks, were members of this cell.

French imperialism reacted to the attacks not by shutting down Islamist terror networks, but by using the attacks to shift politics far to the right, amid a collapse of France's old, discredited political system. After the 2015 terror attacks, neo-fascist leader Marine Le Pen was repeatedly invited to the Elysée presidential palace by then-President François Hollande.

Le Pen emerged as a credible presidential candidate under conditions where the intelligence ties of the Islamist attackers were hushed up, and magazines and newspapers falsely blamed the attacks on a religious war they claimed broad sections of France's Muslim population were

waging.

A key role in this was played by pseudo-left groups like the New Anti-capitalist Party. Having backed the war in Syria, they were silent on the security services' complicity with the Islamist networks and implicitly backed the charade of the "war on terror." As the two main parties of France's post-1968 political system, Hollande's Socialist Party (PS) and The Republicans (LR), both collapsed, the pseudo-left helped shift French mainstream bourgeois politics far to the right.

Above all, Hollande used the state of emergency to ram through unprecedented social cuts demanded by the banks. After a decade of austerity in Europe, anger exploded last year among youth and sections of the working class in France over Hollande's labor law. The state of emergency played a key role in setting up violent police crackdowns on protesting students and strikers, and in creating conditions for the union bureaucracy to wind down the protests after the PS took the unprecedented step of threatening to ban them.

The resort of the ruling class in France and internationally to dictatorial measures is not in the final analysis a sign of strength, but of desperate weakness. As it threatens the working class with the dangers of dictatorship and war in a manner unprecedented since the bloodiest years of the 20th century, the bourgeoisie is also exposing the insoluble crisis of the capitalist regime and blowing up the mechanisms through which it contained the class struggle.

The task of the *Parti de l'égalité socialiste* and the other sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International is to give a revolutionary and socialist perspective to the workers struggles to defend basic social and democratic rights that are on the horizon.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact