

French government fears rise of left

Friday 13 February 2009, by [HENLEY Paul](#) (Date first published: 1 February 2009).

If one wishes to better understand radical left and social movements, who to look for expertise? The author of the article reproduced here answers: turn to a... criminalologist! But do not be surprised if the answers given by the criminalologist are utterly stupid, as those of Alain Bauer below. They tell nothing about the reality of political and social activism - but a lot about the "criminalising" mind of those who govern us.

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"Sarkozy is right to be afraid of us," says Marine, a 22-year-old student and member of the League of Communist Revolutionaries in Toulouse.

"We are the ones who are going to break the rules and the control of the old system. We are the new alternative".

Across Europe, victims of the economic slump who are losing their jobs in their tens of thousands are furious that public money is being doled out to the banks.

In some countries, they are more willing to vent their anger.

As huge crowds took to the streets across France this week, in a national day of protests and strikes, the far left points to a boost in the number of its supporters in times of financial gloom.

The French communist movement has remained a significant political force even in the decades when their cause was less than fashionable abroad.

Now, France's communists believe they are staring at the proof that capitalism has failed, once and for all. And they see an opportunity.

Marine and her fellow party-member, Hugo, who is 18, do not envisage a violent revolution.

"There is no need for guns or bullets," says Hugo, "just a realisation that the situation is not fair, that all the state's money is being spent on the people who need it the least."

Stephane Borrás, who is one of the group's organisers and a candidate to lead a new party that is being formed under the banner of anti-capitalism, says attitudes are changing.

"We are seeing a radicalisation, perhaps the beginning of a very big movement. I am not a clairvoyant, but I live in France, I have a lot of contacts with a wide range of people and it's not just leftists, not just militants who cannot accept the injustice. Inequality is growing in Europe and inequality is always the cause of revolt"

Desperate times

All three campaigners stress the need to forge an effective alliance between the workers and with the downtrodden youth of the suburbs because, as they put it, "that's what the government fears the most".

Up until now, the rioters of the "banlieues", who made headlines with the damage they caused to parts of Paris, Strasbourg, Lyon and Toulouse a couple of years ago, have failed to find effective common cause with the students and intellectuals of the left.

But as times get more desperate for more people, that could change.

Certainly, ministers in Paris are wary of some form of insurrection.

Recent intelligence reports talk about an "elevated threat" from an "international European network... with a strong presence in France" and a "new generation of activists", possibly a "re-birth of the violent extreme left".

A spokesman for the interior ministry, Gerard Gachet, told the BBC that the threat was real.

"The term 'ultra-left' was used by the interior minister to set this group apart from the extreme left who turn up for elections and keep within the parameters of democratic debate," he says.

But talking of more radical groups, he points to recent pamphlets and books published anonymously, but sometimes with a circulation of about 20,000, with titles such as *How to Start a Civil War* and *The Insurrection That is Coming*.

"They say that the fires of revolt will spread everywhere," he says, "and we see acts like damage to bank branches or state buildings and claims of solidarity with the Greek rioters." So there is undoubtedly a threat which needs to be taken into account... This is not about criminalising opinions. Everyone has the right to an opinion. It is about making sure that illegal actions do not take place.... In any case, we can be extremely vigilant. We have surveillance and intelligence teams."

'New level'

Alain Bauer, who is a criminologist from the Sorbonne University in Paris and a writer on terrorism, says alarm bells should be ringing, and makes a comparison with the situation 30 years ago.

"Action Directe and the Red Brigades appeared then in two distinct stages," he asserts.

"Stage one was purely intellectual, with no attempt at violence. Stage two was plots, assassinations and violence." We need to learn from the past. When you write a paper on how to start a civil war, how to destroy public amenities and power supplies, this is very different. You are potentially taking things to a new level.

"Our job as criminologists is to read the books and notice that something is going on".

P.S.

* From BBC News, Sunday, 1 February 2009:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7...>

* Paul Henley for BBC News, Toulouse.