

Citing clashes at May Day rally, French government calls for end to strikes

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After violent clashes erupted during the May Day rally in Paris, allegedly between police and members of the anarchist Black Bloc organization, the French government is pledging to step up police deployments and work more closely with the trade unions to strangle political opposition.

As the march was starting, clashes broke out between around 1,000 hooded individuals and the police forces, who fired tear gas and two water cannon at the protesters. A McDonald's and a Renault car dealership were torched, and the security forces proceeded to carry out mass arrests. Of 276 people detained on Tuesday, 102 were placed in preventive detention; including 22 legal minors and nine foreign citizens (Belgian, Swiss and Colombian), according to police reports.

The government's account raises more questions than it gives answers. It is remarkable that 1,200 hooded people could have reached the protest site, particularly as groups like the Black Bloc are monitored and thoroughly penetrated by police. Interior Minister Gérard Collomb admitted as much when he reported, "There was someone with a Security File at the demonstration."

No clear or definitive account has emerged of the May Day clashes; it is unclear who gave the orders that provoked the violence, which is generally reactionary and serves only the interests of the state by providing a pretext for repression. But what is clear is that the ruling elite is seizing upon this to reinforce police operations against social protest. In this current situation, this means an escalation of repression of university blockades and the rail workers' strike, and closer state collaboration with the union bureaucracy to shut down strike activity.

On May 1, President Emmanuel Macron wrote on Twitter: "I condemn with absolute firmness the

violence that took place today and debased the May Day parades. Everything will be done to identify those responsible for these actions and to hold them to account."

Laurent Wauquiez, leader of the right-wing party, The Republicans, tweeted: "Failure of the security state. We must urgently re-establish our authority: all support to security forces who face these hooligans."

Marine Le Pen of the neo-fascist National Front (FN) declared: "These far-left militias should have been dissolved a long time ago. But the problem is that left-wing governments feel well disposed towards them, by now we can even say they are complicit."

Collomb promised to have "even more security forces" out on the streets during the next protests. He said he could not promise that he would not ban political organizations.

Claiming that the police force is not able to search protesters—although police did precisely that on multiple occasions during mass protests against the Socialist Party (PS) labor law—Collomb also called on the trade unions to collaborate more closely with the authorities: "We must think about a solution together with the trade union organizations." Collomb added the somewhat bizarre remark that if the trade unions "want that there be no more of this (violence), maybe they should get along with us."

These statements constitute a warning for workers. Reinforcements of police powers, under an increasingly authoritarian state regime in France since the imposition of the state of emergency in 2015, are squarely aimed at the working class and its opposition to Macron's policy of austerity and militarism. Current and planned social attacks are designed to free up hundreds of billions of euros earned through the sweat and blood of workers and hand them over to the banks,

the army, and the plans for war.

In the wave of imperialist wars since the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union and the first Gulf War against Iraq in 1991, military tensions have reached the point of a direct military confrontation between NATO and Russia over the issue of a NATO war against Iran and Syria. The bombing of Syria by Macron and his alignment with Trump on Iranian and Syrian issues underscores that French imperialism is determined to join in the imperialist re-division of the Middle East.

Fifty years after the May-June 1968 general strike, however, the bourgeoisie is deeply concerned over rising social opposition in France and around the world, which threatens to upset its war plans. Fearing an international unification of workers struggles against austerity and war, just as a strike movement also develops in the American working class, particularly the teachers, it is far less worried about the damage caused by the protests Tuesday than by the rising strike struggles.

This is why the government is not stressing its plans for a return to intrusive searches of protesters, but its collaboration with the union bureaucracies and the dissolution of political organizations.

For workers and youth who are in struggle, this is a warning: The struggle must be taken out of the hands of the unions. If workers do not organize independently of the union bureaucracies and their political allies, like the New Anti-capitalist Party, these forces will work with the government to strangle the rail strike and, more broadly, all forms of social protest in the working class.

In 2016, when police repression of protests against the Socialist Party's (PS) labor law did not suffice to end the movement, the union bureaucracy used the threat by PS Prime Minister Manuel Valls to ban protests to put an end to the movement.

The trade unions are trying to organize discussions with Prime Minister Edouard Philippe, and they will use the press campaign against the May Day rally to attempt to gradually end the rail strike. They have already accepted talks with Philippe, who said his preconditions for talks were accepting the end of the rail workers statute, the ending of the National Railways (SNCF) monopoly, and the SNCF's conversion into a private company.

Currently, the statements of the leading union

bureaucrats suggest seeking an end to the rail strike. The new general secretary of the Workers Force (FO), Pascal Pavageau, demanded on Sunday that there be a "moratorium" on the rail reforms, so that discussions on the plan could go forward "with serenity. Otherwise, we will never get anywhere."

CFDT leader Laurent Berger, who will meet with Philippe on May 7 at Matignon palace together with officials of the Stalinist General Confederation of Labor (CGT) and Solidarity-Unity-Democracy (SUD), said he was hoping for a discussion about "the real content of the issues." He said, "The exit from the conflict, it's first of all trains that start circulating normally again, but it's also rail workers who don't feel humiliated," saying nothing about whether rail workers' demands would be met.



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