

The raid on Unsubmissive France and the global rise of state repression

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Yesterday, gruesome details emerged on the torture and murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul that shocked millions of people around the world.

Recordings from the consulate confirm that a team of Saudi operatives beat, tortured, killed and dismembered the journalist, an opponent of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. The details of the killing are abhorrent. It was unclear, the *New York Times* wrote, “whether Mr Khashoggi was killed before his fingers were removed and his body dismembered.” Once he was dead, a Saudi forensic specialist expressly sent to Istanbul began helping the others to dismember and hide the remains—advising them to “listen to music” in order to relax while cutting up the corpse.

The Saudi oil monarchy’s resort to murder to destroy a political opponent, and try to terrorize the rest into silence, evokes anger and revulsion internationally. The Khashoggi murder is, however, only the most grotesque expression of a growing resort by the ruling elites to police-state repression, in order to intimidate rising political opposition.

Early Tuesday morning in Paris, thousands of kilometers from Istanbul, a police squad armed with assault rifles and bullet-proof vests barged into the apartment of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the leader of the Unsubmissive France (LFI) party. Fifteen other squads descended on the homes of other LFI officials, and on LFI party headquarters. When Mélenchon arrived at LFI headquarters, where police were confiscating materials and downloading all the data on LFI’s computers, they illegally denied Mélenchon and other LFI members entry.

When Mélenchon and other LFI deputies from the National Assembly forced open the doors, they faced a squad of police, one of whom tackled an LFI member

as Mélenchon demanded they leave.

The next day, an orchestrated campaign began in the media, denouncing Mélenchon for posing as a “political martyr,” in *Libération*’s words, and the courts began investigating him on charges of obstructing justice and assaulting police.

The WSWS unequivocally condemns this outrageous police-state assault. The attack on LFI, a party with hundreds of thousands of sympathizers that received millions of left-wing votes in last year’s presidential elections, aims to intimidate broader opposition to the austerity and police-state policies of French President Emmanuel Macron. It came after two weeks in which Macron, despised as the “president of the rich,” tried and failed to name a government; due to Macron’s unpopularity, politicians refused to join his cabinet, fearing it could end their political careers.

The WSWS has fundamental political differences with Mélenchon, which it has documented extensively. However, he is a leading politician who still commands substantial support. His right to conduct his politics and to protect his headquarters is of fundamental importance.

The interior ministry’s decision to send heavily-armed police to Mélenchon’s apartment, as if he were a terrorist bomber prepared to shoot it out with police, is an unmistakable threat to masses of people in France, across Europe and beyond. A decade after the 2008 Wall Street crash, the ruling elites are aware that their grotesque wealth and policies of austerity and war are overwhelmingly unpopular. Weak governments take desperate measures, and they aim to use ruthlessly the police-state powers built up during the “war on terror” against political opposition.

Like the Saudi regime, the Macron government and governments across Europe, desperate in the face of

enormous popular opposition, are lashing out. Last year, the Spanish government sent thousands of police to Catalonia to assault thousands of peaceful voters in the October 2017 Catalan independence referendum. After suspending the elected Catalan regional government, Madrid jailed top Catalan politicians for organizing the referendum or calling for peaceful protests against Madrid's crackdown, holding them as political prisoners.

And, just after the police raid on Mélenchon and mass anti-fascist demonstrations opposing her government in Berlin, German Chancellor Angela Merkel announced that as the European elections get underway, her government will step up surveillance of opposition parties. She said she would "create guidelines for parties which actively spread disinformation in their campaigns," in order to tighten "domestic security."

The principal target of this censorship and police-state repression is the nascent political opposition in the international working class to capitalism. One diplomat told the *Washington Post* that the Saudi regime, as it sets about murdering its critics, knows "that if meaningful jobs were not found for Saudi Arabia's young and highly educated population, and if the oil-dominated economy were not diversified, 'they were doomed.'"

And in the most advanced capitalist countries, the radicalization of the working class is proceeding rapidly. Amid mass unemployment and a decade of deep austerity since the 2008 crash, the European Union commissioned a poll last year that found that most European youth under 35 would like to join a mass uprising against the social order. In America, similar polls found that young workers prefer socialism over capitalism.

The raids on LFI are a warning: if the ruling elites internationally accept to use such brutal methods against Mélenchon, a former government minister and well-known figure in official politics, they will try to move ruthlessly against the workers and youth.

The central task emerging today is the construction in the working class of an international movement against militarism and police-state repression. In the face of the universal turn to mass spying and police repression by capitalist oligarchies desperate to defend their privileges, the way forward for the working class to defend democratic rights is in a struggle for socialism.

The unanimous turn against Mélenchon in the French media, many parts of which once styled themselves as socialists, is a warning. The layers of the affluent middle class drawn from the post-1968 student movement that dominated what passed for "left" politics have shifted far to the right and cast their lot in with the police state. The struggle to defend democratic rights requires above all the struggle for the political independence of the working class from other class forces.

In particular, while the WSWS unconditionally and unequivocally defends Mélenchon against Macron's repression, it maintains its criticisms of his policies, which played no small role in creating the police-state regime. His party, a relentless promoter of French nationalism, voted after the 2015 terror attacks for the state of emergency that suspended democratic rights and vastly increased police powers. And his recent pledge to ally with the right to defend the French Republic against Macron only strengthened the police forces that are now buying for his head.

Instead, fundamental principles in the struggle against police-state dictatorship include:

- The struggle against police-state dictatorship must be based on the working class, the great revolutionary force in society, uniting behind it all progressive elements in the population.
- It must be anti-capitalist and socialist, as there can be no serious defense of democracy except in the fight to end the dictatorship of finance capital and put an end to the economic system that is the fundamental cause of militarism and police-state rule.
- It must therefore, of necessity, be completely and unequivocally independent of, and hostile to, all political parties and organizations of the capitalist class.
- It must, above all, be international, mobilizing the vast power of the working class in a unified global struggle against imperialism.



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