

Macron sends the French army against anti-austerity protests

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22 March 2019

On Wednesday, French government spokesman Benjamin Griveaux announced that President Emmanuel Macron would mobilize army units during this weekend's "yellow vest" protests against austerity and inequality.

The mobilization of the French army against demonstrators, for the first time since the French military carried out mass torture and murder over 60 years ago in the 1954–1962 Algerian war for independence from France, marks a historic watershed and a warning to workers internationally. Faced with increasingly militant opposition, the financial aristocracy is rapidly moving towards military-police rule.

The official pretext given by President Emmanuel Macron's government for this deployment reeks of a police provocation. The government claims that after the looting of stores on the Champs-Élysées during Saturday's "yellow vest" march in Paris, only troops of the Operation Sentinel counter-terrorism force have sufficient numbers to guard buildings and free up riot police to crack down on violent "yellow vest" protesters.

What took place Saturday in Paris remains totally unclear. Different officials have claimed hundreds of hardened looters who allegedly attacked the Champs-Élysées—but they have identified them variously as ultra-left, "black bloc" or even neo-fascist. No organizations have been identified as responsible, nor were the looters among the 250 protesters police arrested Saturday. Among those, *L'Express* reported, only three were known to the security services, and most "had already participated in previous protests without committing acts of violence."

One of the few people actually identified looting a store, stealing Paris Saint Germain football club

merchandise, was a riot policeman caught on camera by a journalist, whom police then assaulted.

Based on these thoroughly dubious events, the Macron government is calling in the army and issuing bloodcurdling threats against tomorrow's "yellow vest" protest. Macron has denounced all those joining or supporting "yellow vest" protests, which includes 70 percent of the French people, as "complicit" in Saturday's violence. Interior Ministry sources told *Le Parisien* that everyone should "get used to the idea of the security forces wounding people, or worse," even if there "end up being some quadriplegics."

Such statements recall Macron's stated admiration for fascist dictator Philippe Pétain and Georges Clemenceau. The latter, one of the last interior ministers to deploy the army inside France before this was ended after the October 1917 revolution in Russia, oversaw the killing of 18 people by the army—at a time when the army regularly shot and killed workers in strikes and at May Day rallies.

Stunned by opposition to France's "president of the rich," and last month's eruption of mass protests demanding the fall of the Algerian military regime, the government seeks to terrorize the population and, if needed, to return to conditions where it can try to drown protests in blood. This is not a peculiarly French phenomenon, however, but the concentrated expression of the growing international resort by the financial aristocracy to the military and the promotion of authoritarianism against rising popular opposition.

As Macron deploys the army inside France, the Trump administration has declared a state of emergency in the United States, as it sends troops against immigrants on the US-Mexico border. Similar processes are underway across Europe. As right-wing extremist professors in Germany whitewash Hitler's

crimes and members of the fascistic Vox party call for the banning of Marxism in Spain, UK officials are preparing to deploy the army inside Britain during Brexit.

The financial aristocracy's drive towards far-right forms of rule has accelerated in response to a growing international upsurge of the class struggle. Four months ago, on social media and outside France's state-funded union bureaucracies, hundreds of thousands of people launched the "yellow vest" protests against regressive fuel taxes, tax cuts for the rich, low wages, military spending, and austerity. Over the same period, mass strikes organized independently of the unions spread from US teachers to Portuguese nurses, Mexican autoworkers and Sri Lankan plantation workers.

After decades during which the class struggle was suppressed, after the Stalinist dissolution of the USSR in 1991, it is re-emerging around the globe amid growing political opposition to capitalism. The financial aristocracy, wrote *Le Monde diplomatique*, now fears "not losing an election, failing to 'reform,' or taking stock market losses, but insurrection, revolt, destitution." Yet it does not intend to part with any of the trillions of euros in tax cuts and publicly-funded bailouts it has received since the 2008 crash, paid for by the blood and sweat of the workers.

With Macron's mobilization of the army against the "yellow vest" movement, an initial phase of this resurgence of the class struggle is ending. For months, participants in the demonstrations hoped that some tactic, like Swiss-style Citizen-Initiated Referendums (RIC) would allow them to force Macron to reach an agreement with them through the existing institutions on the basis of a national, democratic reform. Macron's decision to send in the army is a warning to workers internationally: the alternatives they face are not reform or revolution, but revolution or counter-revolution.

The critical questions raised by the threats of military-police dictatorship are a turn to the international working class, and the formation within it of committees of action, independent of the trade unions and allied pro-capitalist parties, and organized on the basis of a socialist program.

The threat posed by professional armies and hordes of riot police to the workers is real and very serious. But throughout history, reactionary regimes have hoped that the resort to naked repression and intimidation would

overcome complex social problems for which they had no solution; this has time and again proven to be a fatal miscalculation.

Despite the vast weaponry available to the army and riot police in France and elsewhere, they still face the deep isolation and unpopularity of the government and of the financial aristocracy. The struggle of independent committees of action to mobilize and coordinate opposition among workers and youth against threats or acts of state repression will play a critical role in the struggle against Macron's police-state measures.

Macron's move to send the army against anti-austerity protestors makes clear certain basic realities. Workers in France and all over the world are engaged in a political struggle against the ruling elite, and the state, with its "bodies of armed men," that do its bidding and defend the prerogatives of the capitalist system.

The struggle against Macron's austerity measures requires workers to take up the fight for a socialist program, and to build the *Parti de l'égalité socialiste* (PES), the French Section of the International Committee of the Fourth international.



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