

# May Day: Police rampage in Paris as hundreds of thousands march in France

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As over 310,000 people marched in France for May Day, the international holiday of the working class, riot police launched a brutal and bloody crackdown in Paris. Trade unions as well as “yellow vest” protesters demanding the ouster of President Emmanuel Macron, the “president of the rich,” organized rallies in cities across the country.

In the run-up to May Day, the government issued bellicose warnings that Macron had called for “an extremely firm stance” against any sign of violence by protesters. The Paris police prefecture placed much of the capital city in lockdown: the Champs-Élysées avenue where “yellow vest” protests had been held; the ministry district across the river from there; the neighborhood of the burnt-down Notre Dame Cathedral; and the area around the main May Day march in Montparnasse. Large parts of the Paris metro network were closed.

Ultimately, however, the violence came mainly from an indiscriminate police rampage in Paris, ostensibly aimed at “black bloc” protesters but that targeted peaceful demonstrators, journalists, and union officials. Further proof of the essentially nonviolent character of protests by “yellow vests” and broader layers of workers came from the provinces. Mass marches in Toulouse, Bordeaux, Marseille and other cities overwhelmingly proceeded peacefully.

Police charged the front of the May Day rally in Paris around 1:00 p.m., however, as the roughly 40,000 protesters were about to leave Montparnasse to march towards Italy Square. After clashes broke out between police and several hundred “black bloc” members, police attacked the entire rally, shooting heavy clouds of tear gas at the protesters and carrying out mass arrests.

Annick, a retired member of the Stalinist General

Confederation of Labor (CGT) union attending the protest with her friends, said police “launched an operation, and the water cannon fired on our trade union balloons, just like that, arbitrarily. We usually march near the balloons floated by the unions at the marches to be protected, but we are not even protected anymore because police just fire anyway.”

Jean, a self-employed worker attending the rally, told WSWs reporters that the repression was the outcome of a carefully prepared political campaign: “As soon as shocking threats are made against the police forces or windows are broken, the media rush to focus on that and thus to justify repression by the police, which is increasingly appalling. There are dozens of people who had lost eyes, who are in prison, or who have lost their arms” to police grenades.

Violent clashes with police continued throughout the march. Police carried out 220 arrests, including 180 held for preventive detention. Large groups of protesters, including “yellow vests,” were also assaulted or kettled in side streets off the main route of the demonstration.

As in previous marches, police attacked journalists, including those wearing clothing clearly marking them as “press.” Police beat journalist Viktoria Ivanovna of the Russian RIA Novosti news agency, striking her head and shoulder, as she tried to report on events. “My helmet protected me from serious injury, but my arm still hurts,” Ivanovna said, adding that police struck her even though she was wearing a helmet and armband identifying her as a journalist.

The Russian Foreign Ministry published a statement calling on French authorities to “carry out a careful investigation of this incident... We consider the resort to violence against journalists who are carrying out their professional activities to be unacceptable.”

Police charged top union officials who work closely with the Macron government, as well as workers attending the rally who tried to find refuge under trade union banners and floats. CGT general secretary Philippe Martinez fled the rally for a time, and the CGT was forced to publish a communiqué complaining of “unheard-of repression carried out without discernment.”

Martinez noted, “The police charged the CGT, which was clearly identified, and this is a serious matter. After the interior minister told us ‘I’m in control of the situation, I’ve replaced the police prefect, now you are going to see how things are,’ well now we’ve seen it.”

Martinez obliquely referred to Macron’s role, saying, “The number of demonstrators is considerable despite the pressure that was put on protesters with threats that things would go badly. A climate was created for things to go badly. Who is the interior minister, who is the police prefect? It is not the CGT.”

At the same time, however, Martinez insinuated that “yellow vest” protesters attending the march were violent anarchists, echoing his previous slanders of them as fascistic, and issued bankrupt appeals to Macron to realize the error of his ways. “The president has to change methods, he will not solve the problem with stun grenades,” adding that “yellow vests” and trade unions “are getting to know each other, we have the same demands for wage increases, tax justice, that is good and should continue. But I always look at what is under the yellow vest, sometimes it’s black.”

In fact, the violent police crackdown is a political sign that attempts to negotiate with Macron and the financial aristocracy—the purpose for which France’s hollowed-out union bureaucracies exist and are funded massively by the employers federations and the state—are fruitless. There is nothing to negotiate with the financial aristocracy. The decisive question is building a political leadership to mobilize the working class.

Last week, Macron gave a speech ending his “great debate” on how to respond to nearly six months of “yellow vest” protests demanding his own removal and opposing social inequality. His response was to give the “yellow vests” nothing. He rejected all their proposals for legislative reforms, defended his tax cuts for the rich, and pledged to push ahead with pension cuts and spending increases on military cooperation with

Germany.

The police crackdown on May Day shows that Macron aims to deal with growing social anger in the working class with attempts to beat it into submission. This is why he took the provocative and fascistic decision last year, as the “yellow vest” movement began, to hail France’s Nazi-collaborationist dictator Philippe Pétain during World War II as a “great soldier.”

At the May Day rally, Jean told the WSWS: “Governments are corrupt and are united against the people and their common interest.” Citing the shootings in the United States and the imperialist campaign for a coup in Venezuela as examples of problems facing workers in every country, he added: “Of course I feel solidarity for them. I would like to recall fundamentals of socialist theory from (French revolutionary leader Gracchus) Babeuf to Karl Marx. This is predictable. We have entered into a phase of capitalism where it really becomes an aristocracy.”



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