Tens of thousands protest in Paris against police killings of George Floyd and Adama Traoré

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Tens of thousands filled the Place de la République in central Paris on Saturday afternoon to protest police violence and demand justice for the killings of George Floyd in the United States and Adama Traoré, a French youth killed by police during an arrest in 2016.

The police reported a significantly understated count of 15,000 people in Paris, the figure that has been reported in the media. Twitter videosshow that the real number was in fact several times larger. The Committee for Adama Traoré, which organized the protest, claims that 120,000 took part.

The protesters were overwhelmingly young and encompassed people of every skin color and ethnicity. Protests also took place of between several hundred and thousand in every major French city, many of them organized by local groups of high school students.

This was the second mass protest in as many weeks in France since the protest movement launched in the United States over the killing of George Floyd, which has triggered demonstrations of hundreds of thousands from Europe to New Zealand. The family of Adama Traoré has called protests over the last four years against the cover-up of his killing.

The killing of Floyd also coincided with the handing down of a counter-report by a medical expert requested by the Traoré family on June 2. The report, authored by an unnamed medical specialist at a Parisian hospital, concluded that Traoré had died of a cardiac edema, which it indicated was caused by "positional asphyxiation" during Traoré's violent arrest by three policemen, who put him face down on his stomach as they arrested him.

Adama's sister, Assa Traoré, spoke at the protest and called for a continued mobilisation to demand that the police officers who killer her brother be prosecuted.

"The death of George Floyd, this African-American killed May 25 in Minneapolis by a white police officer directly echoes the death of my brother," she said. "Today it is the French people that is denouncing these actions. It is not just the Traoré family, it is not just the families of the victims. It is the French people. No matter where you come from, what is your religious background or gender; no one can remain a bystander towards a death or to racist and social violence."

Assa also stated that new information had come out about the police officers who had arrested Adama, specifically that one of the three involved in the arrest had personally arrested Adama on at least three or four other occasions. She added that the family would continue to refuse requests from the government to meet with them until charges had been laid against the police officers involved.

They also included immigrants from Africa and the Middle East. Samira, an 18-year-old engineering student from Ivory Coast, said she came to the protest because "When I heard about what had happened to Adama, I said to myself this could have happened to me. As soon as you don't have your papers on you, you can never feel relaxed. You know the police can ask you at any moment. When I go out my mother calls me and asks me if I've brought my papers with me."

As on June 2, the police prefect declared Saturday's protest illegal to prevent people from attending. The organisers had announced that they would march from République to the Opera house, but police cordoned off all the exits with steel barricades to prevent the march from occurring. Videos on social media also show groups of riot police brutally attacking individual

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protesters, while tear gas was used throughout the afternoon.

The Macron administration responded to the eruption of protests by doubling down in defence of the same police forces that it has used to attack "yellow vest" protesters and striking workers over the past three years.

Interior Minister Christophe Castaner initially announced empty and meaningless "reforms," including pledges to prevent police from using the chokehold and to suspend officers who commit racist acts.

Even these cosmetic proposals, which would do nothing to reduce the repressive actions of the police, were denounced by the police unions, who organized demonstrations against the government. By Friday, Castaner had announced that while the choke hold would no longer be taught in police training schools, an internal commission would be set up to decide upon an "alternative" method for conducting arrests, which would include the expanded provision of tasers to the police. He stated that his earlier statements were "stupidities" and that he had "misspoken." Investigations of "racist acts" by the police would be conducted by the police themselves.

The entire political establishment, including its nominal "left" flank in the La France Insoumise (LFI) of Jean-Luc Melenchon, is hostile to any struggle against the police and the capitalist state. Mélenchon has participated in all of the major protests in order to seek to channel them in harmless appeals for a restructuring or reorganization of the police.

Speaking at the Saturday protest, Mélenchon told BFMTV: "We have the right to dream of a society without a police. It's not a forbidden dream, it's a beautiful dream, but it must remain only a dream." There must be a police everywhere, "but organized, disciplined, obedient, and which does not organize itself like a fortress set apart."

Along similar lines, Mélenchon's fellow LFI leader Francois Ruffin had earlier declared that he considered his primary political responsibility to be to "avoid a war, a pitched battle between the police and the population. The breach of trust [between them] is clear from the statistics. How do we restore it?"

Mélenchon and LFI speak as the class-conscious representatives of the financial elite. Their defence of the police forces is produced by their understanding of the social function of the police, as the "bodies of armed men" tasked with protecting the wealth and property of the financial oligarchy from a revolutionary challenge by the working class.

The racism and pro-fascist outlook that is prevalent in the police forces can only be understood as the outcome of this class function. While black and foreign-born workers are statistically more likely to be targeted by the police, police violence is directed against the poor and workers of every background and skin colour.

While around three dozen people are killed every year in France by police, a number that is several orders of magnitude greater are maimed and violently assaulted. For the past three years, the Macron administration has used the police to suppress opposition to its austerity agenda and social inequality. Moreover, while thousands were arrested during the "yellow vest" protests and during the railway strikes against Macron's pension reforms; dozens lost eyes and hands to rubber bullets and flash-bang grenades.

The ruling class is acutely aware that behind the eruption of multi-ethnic protests over the police killing of Floyd and Traoré lies widespread and growing anger in the youth and working class over state violence, war, militarism, and social inequality—conditions that have been intensified by the criminally negligent response of the Macron administration to the coronavirus pandemic.

Le Monde reported on Wednesday, in an article entitled "After the deconfinement, the Elysée fears a wave of revolt: 'We cannot lose the youth,'" that "At the heart of the executive, no one hides anymore the fear of seeing a wave of revolt in the youth. If the United States are not France, the George Floyd affair serves as a vector of the poor conditions of the youngest section of the population."

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