

Global outrage over violent police arrest of 50-year-old French nurse Farida

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The violent police beating and arrest of 50-year-old French nurse Farida, who was participating in national protests to call for increased hospital funding on Tuesday afternoon, have produced justified outrage around the world.

The main video of Farida's arrest and assault by multiple riot officers has been seen more than 2.5 million times. It took place at the Invalides, a popular tourist site in central Paris where a protest of thousands of health care workers had marched to demand increased wages, staffing and hospital funding in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic that has killed more than 29,000 people in the country.

As the nurse is manhandled by police and pleads for her ventolin, the group of three heavily armed riot officers can be seen shoving her face into the ground before marching her away with her face bleeding. In a typical example of the standard *modus operandi* of police toward workers, the officers can be heard telling one another in the video, "No violence, we are being filmed."

Later, another video shows Farida shouting out to witnesses as she is being taken away, when a police officer covers her mouth with his hand to stop her from speaking. A protester yells, "They are stopping her from speaking! You are supposed to be police, not the [fascist] Militia!"

In another video, a police officer is seen kneeling a protester in the face who is bent over and already restrained by two other officers.

Farida was held in detention on Tuesday evening, when a demonstration was called on social media outside the local police precinct where she was being held. The hashtag #LiberezFarida ("Free Farida") is being widely shared on Twitter.

As the video spread within minutes online, various

right-wing commentators attempted to claim that Farida had worn a white coat to the protest in order to impersonate a health worker. This lie was dispelled quickly. Her daughter, a journalist for France24 and BFM-TV, retweeted the video with the comment, "This woman, she is my mother. Fifty years old, a nurse, she has worked for three months for between 12 and 14 hours a day. She caught coronavirus. Today, she protested so that her wages should be correctly re-valued. She is asthmatic. She was wearing her nurse's coat. She is 1m 55cm [5'1"] tall."

Noting the danger that her mother could be further assaulted in police custody, or worse, and citing the example of Adama Traoré—the 24-year-old French youth killed by police in 2016, whose death has inspired mass protests in the past two weeks—she added, "They dared to tell me over the phone that obviously, 'We don't know what happened before the videos, but trust us, if she has done nothing wrong, she will be released. Yes, like Adama Traoré, for example? Of course, 'trust us.' She is still under arrest. Nothing can justify in ANY WAY such an arrest. Not when one is not armed, wearing a hospital coat, when one is 1m55cm tall, and up against a robocop."

Farida was released that evening but has been charged with "rebellion," "insulting police" and violence. She has admitted to throwing small projectiles at heavily-armored riot police prior to her arrest, stating that she was angered over the conduct of the government.

The police assault has served to underscore certain basic realities of political and social life in France and internationally.

In the first place, it shatters the Macron government's already discredited pretense that the pandemic "united" the entire country behind front-line workers, typified by

the nauseating spectacle of officials whose parties have slashed health care funding for decades joining 8:00 p.m. nightly applause for the health care staff. In fact, behind this façade of national unity stand diametrically opposed class interests. At the very first sign of demands by the very same health care workers for increased resources for the hospitals to allow them to combat the pandemic and work in decent and safe conditions, the response of the ruling class and its political representatives is naked repression.

The Macron administration's policies have not been directed at combating the disease, but at protecting French corporate interests, including with an almost €400 billion guarantee of French corporate debts. The administration is now pursuing a back-to-work policy that will lead to a further spread of the deadly virus. It is making clear that it will not accept popular opposition to this policy. Its decision to send hundreds of heavily armed riot police to a national demonstration of nurses can be understood only in this context.

Despite mass support for pay increases for health care workers and increased hospital funding, the Macron administration has already announced that any wage rises for nurses will be more than compensated for by cuts across the health care sector. Health Minister Olivier Véran declared last month that the government would seek to end what he called "straitjackets" preventing health care employees working longer, meaning an end to the 35-hour work week. The slashing of health care spending is seen by the ruling class as necessary to fund a massive transfer of wealth from social programs to fund the bailouts of the rich.

The arrest of Farida also takes place in the context of a global movement of workers and young people against police violence that was triggered by the killing of George Floyd in the United States. The protests have triggered an international movement precisely because police violence is a global phenomenon. From Brazil to France to New Zealand, the police perform essentially the same social function in capitalist society. They are the frontline defenders of the interests of the ruling class against the working population.

The attack on Farida, a white worker of Arabic background, is another demonstration that the targets of police violence are workers of all ethnicities and skin colors. In France itself, the same police forces that have been targeted by demonstrations against the killing of

Adama Traoré have carried out mass repression against peaceful "yellow vest" protests and workers' strikes for the past two years, with dozens of workers' hands blown off by stun grenades and eyes shot out by rubber bullets. In response to the growing movement of the working class for social equality internationally, the ruling class in every country is carrying out police violence and building up the forces of repression.



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