

French police launch violent crackdown on Paris refugee camp

Will Morrow
24 November 2020

French riot police went on a fascistic rampage Monday evening, brutally assaulting a peaceful tent camp of some 500 refugees at the Place de la République in central Paris.

Police used teargas, kicked and beat migrants with batons, tipped refugees out of their tents and assaulted them on the ground. Journalists filming the crackdown were also assaulted. The riot officers threw dozens of confiscated tents into trucks and drove them away.

After the square was cleared, a group of several hundred homeless refugees were forced to march north until they reached the outer suburbs around the city, pursued by police throwing teargas canisters as they went. Other groups were forced south towards City Hall, repeatedly assaulted and tear-gassed by police units along the way. Police surrounded and kettled the refugees, also kettling a group of elected Paris officials whom police prevented from speaking to the refugees.

Videos of the assault have been viewed hundreds of thousands of times, provoking disgust and outrage in France and worldwide. Last night, in an expression of mass opposition to the Macron government's policies, thousands joined a protest at the Place de la République, despite the coronavirus lock-down, to express solidarity with the migrants and denounce the police attack.

The encampment was set up on Monday afternoon to draw attention to the horrendous conditions facing refugees. On Tuesday last week, riot police had forcibly evacuated an encampment of 3,000 people in Seine-Saint Denis, north of Paris. After waiting for hours for a bus that was to take them to temporary accommodation centers, between 500 and 1,000 people were told by police that there was no room for them, and ordered to leave the area on foot.

"The police told us to go towards the Porte de la Chapelle, without telling us why," a young Afghan migrant who had been at the camp for two months told *Le*

Parisien. "There was teargas, we had to run. That night, there were many of us trying to find a place to sleep on the streets."

Thousands of refugees sleep homeless in France every night. They receive no accommodation, no income, no food, have no legal right to work and no government support of any kind under the anti-refugee policies upheld by the entire French political establishment and the European Union. Amid the coronavirus pandemic, the government's only response to the danger of the virus spreading throughout the tent camps has been to repeatedly disperse the largest camps with violent police crackdowns. They have provided little or no support to the migrants.

As anger at the police crackdown grew on Monday evening, the Macron government was forced into damage control. Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin, who in August said he "chokes" at hearing protesters use the words "police violence," hypocritically claimed that he was "shocked" by the images of the operation and was requesting a "report" from the Paris police chief.

In reality, the police assault is the putting into action of the policies of the Macron government. It follows years of brutal police crackdowns on "yellow vest" protests against social inequality, workers' strikes and protests by students and youth. Videos of protesters being beaten, shot with beanbag bullets, dragged and kicked have been shared on social media and viewed by millions.

Since the 2015-2017 state of emergency suspending democratic rights, successive governments have given the police a green light to use ever more draconian violence. Brutal assaults on migrants, such as the dismantling of the Calais and Grande Synthe refugee camps, served to develop police forces capable of bloody violence against the entire working class. Under Macron, police units that assaulted peaceful elderly women at protests, killing Zineb Redouane and badly injuring Geneviève Legay,

received police medals.

In 2019, the French army was authorized to open fire on “yellow vest” protesters—the first time the army had received such authorization since the 1948 miners strike in the aftermath of the fall of the Nazi-collaborationist Vichy regime.

Monday’s police rampage took place just hours after the National Assembly voted to approve the government’s “Global Security Law,” which now goes to the Senate to be voted on in January. Under this law, anyone publishing images of a police officer at a public event in a way that might “harm the officer’s physical or psychological well-being” can be jailed for a year and fined €45,000. It also permits police to deploy drones using facial recognition technology over protests.

The law, which criminalizes documenting the crimes and actions of police, has been denounced by international human rights organizations and the United Nations. The UN stated that, if approved, it would violate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as the European Convention of Human Rights.

These events constitute a sharp warning. Broad layers of the ruling class, in France and worldwide, are preparing a fascistic police state to suppress mounting working class opposition.

The COVID-19 pandemic has served as a trigger event, accelerating the bourgeoisie’s turn to authoritarian rule. It has led to an unprecedented economic collapse and, thanks to murderous “herd immunity” policies pursued by the bourgeoisie across Europe, a horrific death toll. With over 1.4 million dead worldwide, the number of officially recorded COVID-19 deaths in France just topped 50,000, including 592 yesterday alone.

Last week, in the neo-fascist magazine *Valeurs actuelles*, retired General Pierre de Villiers argued that these crises would require scrapping the rule of law—that is, turning to dictatorship.

He said, “Today there is not only the security crisis but the pandemic, all amid an economic, social and political crisis and with our leaders no longer enjoying any broader confidence. When we put together these threats, there is every reason to be afraid in the short term. I fear these suppressed resentments can all explode at the same time. Yes, this is a historic tipping point, not just in France but in the whole world... I think the changes we are facing mean that we will see profound transformations. We must think the unthinkable.”

Asked what this meant, he said: “Changing apparently immutable norms on social organization. The rule of law

is obviously a nice thing, but sometimes you also have to think strategically.”

Fighting the bourgeoisie’s accelerating turn to dictatorship requires the construction of an international movement in the working class fighting for socialism, against nationalist hatreds and for the unity of the working class. This requires first of all defending immigrants against the EU’s far-right, police state policies against migrants. Such a struggle of necessity must be completely independent of the capitalist political establishment.

Monday’s police assault, supported by the Republican Party and the far-right National Rally, was denounced by the Greens, the Socialist Party (PS) and Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s Unsubmissive France party. Their criticisms of Macron are, however, completely cynical. All these parties voted for the two-year state of emergency under Socialist Party President François Hollande and helped implement the build-up of police powers since then.

In a press conference on Monday, Mélenchon said videos of the police attack show “scenes of a rare barbarism signaling a slide toward an authoritarian regime by the president of the Republic.” Yet in Spain, Mélenchon’s ally, Podemos, is part of a Socialist Party-led government that is building prison camps on the Canary Islands to detain thousands of refugees. Like its EU counterparts, it shut down rescue operations for refugees crossing the Mediterranean to Europe, letting thousands drown each year to deter others from exercising their right to claim asylum.

This underscores that the adoption of a humane policy towards migrants, like a scientific policy against the pandemic, requires building a political movement to transfer state power and control over the resources of the world economy to working people.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact