

French National Assembly adopts “global security” ban on filming of police

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On Tuesday, despite mounting concerns in the press over President Emmanuel Macron’s authoritarian agenda, the French National Assembly adopted the “global security law.” The law, which bans filming of police in public places and escalates police surveillance of demonstrations, testifies to the Macron government’s authoritarian evolution since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The bill, presented by Macron’s Republic on the March (LRM) party and the Act party, a pro-Macron split-off from the right-wing The Republicans, was adopted by 388 votes to 104 with 66 abstentions. It will now go to the Senate in January for approval. Prime Minister Jean Castex said it “will be the subject, after its passage through parliament, of validation by the Constitutional Council.” This was a cynical attempt to reassure the public that the law’s blatantly anti-democratic and unconstitutional provisions will be subject to control by constitutional lawyers.

The law contains multiple provisions aiming to block the exercise of fundamental, constitutionally protected rights. It would allow police to massively escalate the deployment of drones to monitor demonstrations. Above all, the publication of images of events in a public space involving police agents in a way that could potentially harm their “physical or psychological well-being” would be punishable by a €45,000 fine and 1 year in prison.

This aims to prevent the documentation and exposure of police brutality, giving security forces a free hand against strikes and protests. During “yellow vest” protests, as police beat and detained over 10,000 people, wounded 4,400, and shot two dozen eyes out with rubber bullets, they were constantly recorded in acts of brutality. Videos of police choking to death deliveryman Cédric Chouviat in Paris or George Floyd

in Minneapolis, which provoked a global wave of mass protests, could be banned and their authors face draconian penalties.

Associations of journalists, who have been repeatedly beaten at protests in recent weeks, criticized the law as a “serious threat” to press freedom. The Magistrates Union (SM) criticized its turn to a “police state” and a “collapse of democratic controls.” Claire Hédon, the French government’s official human rights ombudsman, declared that it “poses serious risks of infringing several fundamental rights, including the right to privacy and freedom of information.”

Similarly, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights had expressed its “serious concerns” about the “global security” law in a November 16 statement, which declared: “We fear that the adoption and entry into force of this bill could lead to important attacks on human rights and fundamental liberties.”

Statements by Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin aiming to reassure the public—declaring that the law means “Film the police yes, but hunt them down, no”—are politically worthless. Police will be empowered to arrest protesters and seize their phones or cameras, based on nothing more than the assertion that they feel “psychologically uncomfortable” being filmed while assaulting protesters.

Fundamental rights inscribed into the constitution after the fall of the Nazi-collaborationist Vichy regime, as a safeguard against future fascist dictatorship, would thus be a dead letter. To exercise the constitutional rights to strike and to demonstrate publicly today, in France and across Europe, entails the ever-present danger of police assault, serious injury or worse. Macron has backed police in acts of unprovoked, lethal violence like the killing of an elderly female bystander at a Marseille “yellow vest” protest, Zineb Redouane;

the police unit involved was later awarded a medal.

The only limited control holding back riot police is fear of public exposure by videos posted online by protesters. Now, the Macron administration is attempting to remove this protection.

The truth must be told: Macron is setting up a dictatorship. Prominent Macron voters including football player Lilian Thuram and filmmaker Costa-Gavras have published an open letter titled “Mr President, we did not vote for this,” making a warning and an appeal to Macron that will of course inevitably be disappointed: “Letting this attack on our liberties and our rights go through means installing what the neo-fascist far right has always dreamed of: an authoritarian state, where rule of law becomes rule by police, criminalizing social protests and popular demands.”

The arbitrary, dictatorial nature of Macron’s policy was underscored by reports that the government slipped a provision into a law on university research funding that punishes students occupying universities with up to 3 years in jail and a €45,000 fine.

These events confirm the analysis of the *Parti de l’égalité socialiste* (Socialist Equality Party—PES), the French section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), during the 2017 presidential elections. It called for an active boycott and a mobilization of the working class against a second round between Macron and neo-fascist candidate Marine Le Pen. The PES warned that Macron was in no way an alternative to the authoritarian, far-right regime a neo-fascist president Le Pen would oversee.

The middle class, pseudo-left organizations like Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s Unsubmissive France party or the New Anti-capitalist Party took an opposed line. Despite broad hatred among their voters of Macron, a former investment banker, they refused to take a clear position on the vote and, in particular, to oppose the press campaign asserting that those who did not vote for Macron were complicit in the coming to power of fascism.

Macron’s presidency confirmed the warnings of the PES, however. Working in lockstep with the European Union, he sought to massively enrich the financial aristocracy by systematically reversing social and democratic concessions made to the working class after the fall of fascism. While rewriting the Labor Code, waging war in Mali, privatizing the national rail

network, and adopting deep pension cut in the face of overwhelming popular disapproval, he relied on a far-right police apparatus to protect him from mounting popular anger.

Facing an upsurge of international class struggle since 2018 that has spread across every continent, launched by mass strikes of US teachers and auto workers and that took the form in France of the “yellow vest” protests, Macron promoted the far right. Hailing Vichy dictator Philippe Pétain as a “great soldier,” he has mobilized the riot police in a ferocious assault on working class opposition.

The ruling elite’s fascistic “herd immunity” policy on Covid-19, which led to nearly 800,000 deaths in North America and Europe, has brought this crisis to unprecedented intensity. Democratic forms of rule are disintegrating. In America, a coup attempt is unfolding: Trump is refusing to admit defeat in the 2020 presidential elections while naming far-right Special Forces operatives to lead the Pentagon and endorsing far-right networks that tried to assassinate officials opposing him.

In France, Macron is also setting up a fascistic police-state in real time, relying primarily on the fact that no one in the political establishment will mount opposition to his policies, let alone mobilize the vast opposition that exists in the working class to his police-state regime. The trade unions have in fact worked closely with Macron throughout his presidency.

Workers and youth have set up many organizations and groups in the social struggles that have unfolded in recent years. It is vital now to build workplace and school security committees against the pandemic. Above all however, political perspective is decisive. Building a socialist movement in the working class internationally to oppose “herd immunity” policies, police-state policies and prepare the transfer of power to the working class is the only way to stop mass deaths and far-right rule.



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