

The anti-refugee police riot in Paris: A warning to the working class

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Heavily armed riot police descended on a tent camp on Republic Square in Paris Monday night and staged a fascistic attack that shocked millions of workers and youth internationally.

Police savagely beat defenseless refugees in their tents and chased them through the streets of Paris, firing tear gas. When elected officials tried to speak to refugees who fled to City Hall, they were kettled behind a police cordon. Moreover, even as the government adopted an authoritarian “global security” law that includes a ban on filming of police in public, under pain of one year in prison and a €45,000 fine, police assaulted journalists covering their operation and were videoed throwing journalist Rémy Buisine to the ground and beating him.

As public anger mounted, and protests broke out on Republic Square, various newspapers and politicians suddenly rediscovered their objections to police brutality. The *New York Times* criticized the “drift towards repression” in France. Socialist Party (PS) Mayor of Paris Anne Hidalgo wrote to the Interior Ministry about “the use of disproportionate and brutal force,” before adding, “Unfortunately, this unacceptable episode is not without precedent.”

Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s Unsubmissive France (LFI) party criticized violence against “people who are only demanding their human rights.”

President Emmanuel Macron’s government now feels obliged to criticize its own operation, even trying to turn the crisis to its advantage. Interior Minister Gérard Darmanin has promised an investigation, claiming he is “shocked,” and Prime Minister Jean Castex has pledged to submit the ban on filming police to a challenge at the Constitutional Council once the “global security” law is adopted.

These are false promises aiming to lull workers and youth to sleep. The brutal state attack on refugees is not an isolated case of “overaggressive policing” by a few

bad cops encouraged by a poorly drafted law. Amid a global economic collapse driven by the COVID-19 pandemic, an irrepressible conflict is emerging internationally between the working class and the financial aristocracy, powerful sections of which support building fascist police states. The alternative of socialist revolution or capitalist barbarism is starkly posed.

Even if the filming ban were overturned, this would not halt the Macron administration’s far-right evolution. It is also passing laws to make student occupations of universities punishable by three years in prison and a €45,000 fine, and reviving the drastic pension cut it promised to abandon during the pandemic. Its “global security” law would deploy drones against protests and set up emergency joint coordination of operations by national, municipal and paramilitary police and private security agencies.

With 450,000 armed men to be deployed against the population, *Le Monde* wrote, France has one policeman “per 150 inhabitants (against 1 per 280 in 2018),” making it “the European Union’s security leader.”

Given the massive police state build-up, the remarks of neofascist retired chief of staff General Pierre de Villiers to the far-right magazine *Current Values* bear examination.

Last year, after the Macron government had authorized the army to open fire on “yellow vests” protesting social inequality, de Villiers called for more “firmness” against the workers. Even after riot police had arrested over 10,000 people and wounded 4,400 in the protests, he demanded harsher repression of railway and education strikes: “A gulf has emerged between those who lead and those who obey. This gulf is profound. The ‘yellow vests’ were already a first sign of this... We must restore order; things cannot continue this way.”

Last week, de Villiers told *Current Values* the crisis is so deep that “profound transformations” are inevitable.

“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.”

Since “these suppressed resentments can all explode at the same time... not just in France but in the whole world,” de Villiers said, “We must think the unthinkable.”

Asked what this meant, de Villiers all but openly endorsed a neofascist dictatorship: “The rule of law is obviously a nice thing, but sometimes you also have to think strategically.”

The COVID-19 pandemic is a trigger event in world history. Already before the pandemic, an international eruption of class struggle against unsustainable levels of social inequality had deeply shaken the ruling elite. Now, as deaths mount and with the economy collapsing, social misery is rising at a rate not seen since the Great Depression and the fascist era of the 1930s, when the financial aristocracy pursued a fascistic, class-based policy to defend its privileges against the working class and turned to military conflict against their rivals during a decade that ended in world war.

While seizing trillions of euros and dollars in public funds for bank bailouts, the world’s ruling elites are ordering workers and youth back to work and school amid the pandemic. After the EU’s €2 trillion bailouts, France’s wealthiest have recouped their losses from the initial crash during the pandemic: Bernard Arnault and family are back to \$142 billion, Françoise Bettencourt to \$72 billion, and François Pinault to \$46 billion, according to *Forbes*.

Workers are told, however, that there is no money for health care or jobs, or to fund a longer lockdown to halt the spread of the virus during which workers and small businessmen receive full financial support. The trade unions in France, Germany and elsewhere throughout Europe issued public endorsements of EU bailouts and backed the back-to-school campaign. As a result, there have been a staggering 265,891 COVID-19 deaths in the United States and 365,639 in Europe—figures set to rise explosively in the coming winter months.

Such levels of inequality are incompatible with democratic forms of rule, which are disintegrating. After trying to illegally deploy the military against nationwide protests on the police killing of George Floyd, US President Donald Trump has refused to admit defeat in the 2020 elections, ominously reshuffled the Pentagon leadership, and backed far-right militias that tried to assassinate top officials, including Michigan Governor

Gretchen Whitmer. The Democratic Party has consciously avoided alerting the public, let alone making any attempt to mobilize popular opposition to the threatened coup.

In France and across Europe, far-right police states are being built. Pseudo-left parties like Mélenchon’s LFI are no alternative to the fascistic policy of de Villiers, which Macron is implementing with EU support. Macron has led the far-right turn, hailing Nazi-collaborationist dictator Philippe Pétain as a “great soldier” as he ordered riot police to assault the “yellow vests.” Mélenchon’s parliamentary faction itself supported the 2015-2017 Socialist Party (PS) state of emergency, during which the current police machine was prepared and first deployed against social protests targeting the draconian PS labor law.

These events confirm the analysis of the *Parti de l’égalité socialiste* (PES), the French section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), in the 2017 presidential elections. It called for an active boycott and a mobilization of the working class against a second round between Macron and neofascist candidate Marine Le Pen.

The PES warned that rule by Macron was no genuine alternative to the far-right regime a neofascist president Le Pen would oversee. It opposed the reactionary role of pseudo-left groups like the LFI, which refused to warn against Macron’s own fascistic policy agenda. This has proven correct.

The way forward against the pandemic and the threat of dictatorship is the mobilization of the working class internationally on a socialist program. The struggle for an international general strike led by independent safety committees in schools and workplaces to compel an end to the back-to-work campaign and halt contagion entails a struggle against the far-right and police violence. Ruling elites that have made themselves guilty of crimes and reactionary plots against the population must be expropriated by the working class and their property impounded and used to meet social needs.



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