

French police filmed violently assaulting music producer in Paris

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A video published Thursday of the violent police assault of a music producer in central Paris has provoked outrage in France and internationally.

The video's release comes three days after the police rampage at Republic Square against a peaceful refugee encampment, and as the Macron government is pushing through a law to criminalize the filming of the actions of police officers. Published by the online publication *Loopsider*, the video of the attack has already been seen more than 12 million times.

The victim, Michel Zecler, was returning to his recording studio in the city's 17th district last Saturday evening, just after 7:30pm. He entered the building after seeing a group of police officers nearby. He was not wearing a mask, which is required by coronavirus lock-down restrictions. Unknown to Michel, and without any warning, the police entered the studio as well and approached him from behind.

"Before hearing anything I felt a hand that pushed me, or pulled me, and then they asked me to leave. I said I was in my place... It happened so fast that I asked myself if they were real police." One of the police officers was in civilian clothing. The events were captured on the studio's CCTV camera. The police entered the room with Michel, closed the door behind them, and beat him for several minutes. He was kicked a dozen times, punched twenty times, and hit with a truncheon another 15 times, mainly on the face and the skull.

"I said to myself, if I fall to the ground I am not going to get back up," Michel, who has come forward publicly to the media, told *Loopsider*. At no point in the video does he offer any resistance. Michel, who is black, said the officers repeatedly abused him with racial slurs, calling him a "dirty negro." The attack only stopped when a group of teenage music artists

who were in the recording studio on the floor below managed to force their way into the room, causing the police to flee outside.

"They are 16-year-old kids," Michel said. "They asked me what happened, and I said I had no idea. I was covered in blood." The officers then smashed a window and threw a teargas canister into the room. "I told myself this is going to be my last day," he said.

A second video of the street shot from above by neighbors shows a group of at least seven police huddled around the entrance of the building as Michel leaves. Two of them are pointing what appear to be guns at him. When he leaves onto the street, the police surround him and beat him from all sides. Two officers went inside to find the youth, who had hidden from the teargas. "They started hitting us," one told the media later. "Then I heard, 'Camera! Camera!' It was the [neighbours] who were filming. From the moment I heard that, they stopped hitting us."

Michel was then brought to the local police office, where the officers—unaware of the CCTV footage—filed false charges of rebellion against him, claiming he had "dragged" them into his studio, attacked them, and reached for their weapons. He was placed in detention for 48 hours. The charges were only dropped when the video was shown to the police.

"Without this video, I would be in prison today," Michel said. "I would be in prison and all my loved ones, my friends, would have thought, like the police said in their statements, that I had wanted to take their weapon, that I had hit them." As his comments make clear, there is nothing particularly unique about the latest incident of police violence. Had it not been filmed, Michel would have been like countless other victims of police aggression whose claims are denied by the police themselves.

The Macron government, fearful of an explosion of opposition in the population, released a cynical statement Friday that the president was “shocked” when he saw the videos. He has allegedly requested a report from Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin. The three police have been suspended, and Darmanin has claimed he will “press” for their dismissal. Another internal police investigation, which invariably result in clearing the officers of all wrongdoing, has also been announced for Monday’s police assault at Republic Square.

Behind these empty statements, Macron, who hailed fascist dictator Petain as a “great soldier” in 2018, is rapidly building an authoritarian police state, and moving to grant the police impunity for their violence against the population. The assault of Michel has only underscored the significance of the government’s “global security” law, passed by the National Assembly on Monday, which criminalizes filming police in public places, on the basis of subjective criteria that the police fear they may be physically or psychologically harmed as a result of the video.

The government is now attempting to counter mass opposition to the law with the announcement that it has appointed a special commission to “re-write” the relevant Article 24 before the law is submitted to the Senate in January. A demonstration today against the law was banned by police, but the ban was overturned by the administrative court last night, allowing the protest to proceed.

The latest police outrages and the government’s law have been criticized by the Socialist Party, Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s Unsubmissive France, and the Greens. All of these parties support the buildup of a police state in France, having backed the two-year state of emergency imposed under the Socialist Party government of François Hollande.

Their fear is that Macron’s open turn toward a dictatorship will trigger an explosion of working class opposition. Voicing these fears, *Le Monde* published an editorial yesterday, “Police: A grave crisis of command,” warning: “Gérald Darmanin, chosen by the President of the Republic to appeal to conservative voters, is threatening to drag the country into a terribly dangerous spiral of unrest, aggravated by the many tensions tied to the lock-down.”

The editorial absurdly presents police violence as a

problem of “leadership,” and its proposal amounts to a call to replace the internal police control organization with a “control organization that is truly independent.”

In reality, Macron’s drive to a police state is part of a turn toward authoritarian forms of rule by capitalist governments around the world. It is driven by the tremendous growth of social inequality that has been intensified by the coronavirus pandemic and the preparations of the ruling class to brutally suppress opposition in the working class. For the past two years, Macron’s police have beaten thousands of “yellow vest” protesters and striking workers, shot dozens of eyes out with rubber bullets, and blown off hands with stun grenades.

The fact that this repression has been directed at the entire working class demonstrates that police violence is fundamentally a product of class, not racial, oppression.

The latest assault on Michel appears to have been motivated at least in part by racism, which is deliberately cultivated in the police forces by the ruling class, where there is a strong base of support for the neo-fascist right. The cultivation of fascistic police aims to ensure that these forces are capable of brutal violence against the entire working population.

Moreover, countless similar incidents have taken place against workers of all ethnicities. On January 3, police killed Cédric Chouviat, a white delivery driver, during a traffic stop, by kneeling on him as he cried “I’m suffocating”—the same phrase used by George Floyd before he was killed by police earlier this year in the United States. In June, Farida, a white health worker of Arabic background, was filmed being violently assaulted by police during a protest demanding improved health funding.



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