

France: Protests continue against police violence and the “global security” law

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On Saturday, dozens of demonstrations took place across France in opposition to police violence and the “global security” law that passed its first reading in the Senate on Thursday.

The United Nations condemned the “global security” law when the Macron government proposed it last year, saying its ban on filming police officers undermined “democratic control of public institutions.” Nevertheless, both houses of the French parliament are set to approve the law. Devised by Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin, a former member of the far-right Action Française, it aims to free the police state from any restraint in its operations against strikes and demonstrations.

Demonstrations were held in Lille, Rouen, Rennes, Nantes, Brest, Limoges, Toulouse, Marseille, Nîmes, Lyon, Strasbourg and dozens of other cities, called by the collective #StopLoiSecuriteGlobale. The group includes journalists unions, the Human Rights League and groups of “yellow vest” protesters previously injured or mutilated by the police.

The police allowed the protests to go ahead, even though the Macron government had announced on Thursday that it was imposing a new pseudo-lockdown. This only served to re-emphasise that the government, which is keeping nonessential industries and schools open, is opposed to a genuine policy of social distancing. While France has passed the milestone of 4.3 million cases and 90,000 deaths from COVID-19, it is allowing new variants of the virus to spread.

The demonstrations revealed a basic contradiction. While the government is discredited by its disastrous health care policy and is setting up an authoritarian regime, only a few thousand people participated. It is clear that this is related to the silence of the protest organisers on the central questions facing the working

class: social austerity and especially the COVID-19 pandemic. These groups have nothing to say about Macron’s policy against workers or are even complicit in it.

The demonstrators’ demands against police violence are legitimate and enjoy wide support. After last year’s police beating of a peaceful music producer, Georges Zécler, was captured on video at his studio in Paris, an Ifop poll showed that only 37 percent of the population trusted the police. But the statements by the protest organizers, such as the #StopLoiSecuriteGlobale collective, were silent on the pandemic.

There were 500 protesters in Lyon, where a police helicopter was deployed overhead; 400 in Rennes and 300 in Lille, where protesters chanted “cops, rapists, murderers” and “police everywhere, justice nowhere.” In Bordeaux, a “Truth and Justice” procession of several hundred people representing mutilated “yellow vests” marched through the city. In Paris, where demonstrators carried signs reading “Liberté, égalité, éborgné” [liberty, equality, maimed to lose an eye] or “Floutage de gueule, démocratie floutée”, between 5,000 and 10,000 people demonstrated.

Several families of victims of police violence spoke in Paris. Assa Traoré, the leader of the Adama Traoré Collective and sister of Adama Traoré, who was choked to death by the police in 2016, addressed the crowd. She listed the protesters’ demands, including “an end to permanent identity checks,” the suspension of accused police officers, and “a ban on choking techniques.” She chanted, “No justice, no peace” with the protesters.

“In a democratic country, you don’t have the right to kill. Don’t kill us, we didn’t deserve this,” said Christian Chouviat, the father of Cedric Chouviat, a 43-year-old delivery worker who was choked to death

by police during a traffic stop in central Paris.

The media imposed a near-universal blackout on the protests, despite the widespread opposition to the Macron government. On Twitter, however, there were numerous tweets to the protest linking it to the #BlackLivesMatter movement, a racial political movement whose leaders are closely connected to the Democratic Party in the US.

While Macron is pursuing the same policy of herd immunity that has led to almost 900,000 COVID-19 deaths across Europe and is building up a police state, the protest organisers were calling on Macron and Darmanin to negotiate with them.

Their statement calling the protest demanded “the opening of discussions with the Ministry of the Interior and the parliamentary group La République en Marche,” Macron’s party. It called for a “social dialogue” between the unions and the government. “This bill aims to undermine the freedom of the press, the freedom to inform and be informed, freedom of expression, in short, the fundamental public freedoms of our Republic. Social dialogue, democracy, that is all that we, journalists, producers, citizens, aspire to.”

Yet there is nothing to negotiate with Macron. He has chosen a murderous coronavirus policy for the same reasons that he is pursuing austerity and the militarisation of France’s external and internal security. He represents the financial aristocracy and French imperialism in the midst of a historic economic and social crisis of world capitalism. Macron will do everything to ensure that workers stay at work so that profits continue to accumulate in the pockets of the banks and corporations.

The national union federations whose journalists unions were demonstrating yesterday—including the General Federation of Labour (CGT) and Solidaires—are steeped in this political criminality. They organised the return to work and reopening of schools in the late summer of 2020, when the spring lockdown had limited the circulation of the virus. But while it was still circulating, there was no proper tracking system put in place. There have been 62,000 deaths from COVID-19 in France and 700,000 in Europe since then.

In the summer, the CGT signed a protocol to approve the European Union bank and corporate bailouts, which handed more than two trillion euros to the banks and big companies.

The government, political establishment and trade union apparatuses of the ruling class are doing everything possible to impose a deadly health care policy. This is clearly impacting on social layers who are disoriented and demoralised by the social isolation resulting from the pandemic.

In Marseille and Annecy, several thousand young people gathered for a “carnival,” without masks and without social distancing measures. “Young people are fed up with being confined,” said Romain in Marseille, where there were 6,500 young people participating in the carnival.

“I know lots of friends who are going to Madrid, where everything is open. So it’s good to see that,” Quentin, a 26-year-old medical intern, told *Le Monde*.

With more than 30,000 new cases of COVID-19 diagnosed every day in France, it is statistically certain that this irresponsible carnival will spread the coronavirus. However, the denunciations of the event coming from Interior Ministry spokesman Camille Chaize, who pointed to the “partyers who, in total irresponsibility, participated in this carnival.” But this irresponsibility is promoted incessantly from the top of the police state itself.

Opposing the drive to a police state and stopping the pandemic through a genuine policy of social distancing requires the international mobilisation of the broadest sections of the working class. It means breaking the political shackles imposed on workers by the trade union apparatuses and racial and national politics. Adopt working class and socialist policies! This means a conscious break with the unions’ policy of “social dialogue,” and the building of a socialist movement in the international working class, organised independently of the unions, fighting for power.



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