Macron’s Global Security bill passed into law in France

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Last Thursday, April 15, the French National Assembly voted to approve the Macron government’s “global security” bill, which significantly expands police powers. The law had already been approved by the Senate in February; with Thursday’s vote, it now comes into law.

The law has triggered mass protests since it was first placed before the National Assembly in November last year. Its centerpiece, Article 24, restricts the right of the population to film the police. While presented in the name of defending police officers from targeted attacks, its clear aim is to provide police, who are regularly filmed engaged in violent attacks on protesters and workers, with impunity to violently assault the population, by preventing the population from filming them.

In the face of protests of tens of thousands, the Macron government had pledged to “rewrite” Article 24. The new version no longer explicitly mentions the “sharing of images” of police agents. Instead, it criminalizes any act which “provoke[s], with the obvious aim that their physical and mental safety will be subject to attack, the identification of an agent of the national police, military or gendarmerie while they are acting as part of a police operation.” It carries a maximum sentence of five years’ jail and a €75,000 fine.

In practice, anyone who publishes a video identifying a police agent faces the danger of being criminally prosecuted, and the onus will be placed on them to demonstrate that they did not have an “obvious aim” of bringing about an attack on an officer.

Workers and young people in France and internationally have been outraged at the videos of the violence and brutality of the French state toward peaceful protests. In 2018, millions witnessed the videos of riot police dragging protesters across the road, shooting rubber bullets and tear gas canisters, and using attack dogs and truncheons against “yellow vest” protesters opposing social inequality.

Last November, hundreds of thousands joined protests across the country in response to incidents of police brutality that were caught on video. On November 26, Loopsider published a video of a vicious police assault on music producer Michel Zecler in his Paris recording studio. Zecler was beaten for over 20 minutes. He was then thrown in prison for 48 hours and falsely charged with assault, and only released after police were presented with the CCTV footage proving what had actually happened.

The following week, police had been filmed on a rampage at the Republic Square in the center of the city, beating refugees who were camped there in protest at the lack of housing and government support.

The Macron government is seeking to oppose the spread of videos of police because it is aware of the explosive opposition to the repression by his government against the working population.

The “global security” law also includes other measures further strengthening the police. For the first time, it authorizes in legislation the use of drones for police surveillance, which had already been in place in practice. Drones are permitted to be used to monitor all protests. Police are to be equipped with body cameras which are to stream live video directly to headquarters.

The bill includes no restrictions on the use of bodycam footage by automated facial recognition technology. Last December, the Macron government enacted a series of executive decrees which expanded the conditions in which police could collect detailed files on the population, including the views and political activities of citizens. It removed a clause in the

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existing police rules which explicitly precluded the use of police files by large-scale automated facial recognition technology.

The legal liberties association Quadrature du Net noted at the time: “If, via the global security law, all protesters can be filmed at a protest, and … a large portion of them can be identified via facial recognition technology, the [police filing systems] have already prepared for them a complete system for centralizing all the information concerning them, without this surveillance ever being authorized nor weighed by a judge.”

Under the “global security” law, police are also permitted to carry a weapon with them at all times in public places, such as restaurants and cinemas, including when they are off duty.

In an interview with the right-wing daily *Le Figaro* on Sunday, Emmanuel Macron said he would meet his election pledge to create 10,000 new positions in the police before the end of his five-year term next year. “Every French person will see more blue on the ground in 2022 than in 2017,” he said.

The National Assembly’s vote approving Macron’s police-state law came as the official, under-counted death tally of the coronavirus in France surpassed 100,000. The mass death is the result of the policies pursued by Macron, who has refused any scientific lockdown policy that would require the closure of non-essential production. Schools and non-essential workplaces have been kept open so that workers could remain on the job, and profits continue to grow for French corporations.

Alongside this death on a mass scale, the year has witnessed the further enrichment of a tiny corporate elite. Its 42 billionaires now have a combined wealth of $512.2 billion, after an increase of more than 66 percent in a single year. The French ruling class views with fear the eruption of social anger against its policies of profiteering on mass death and is building up the forces of state repression against that.

The Socialist Party, the Greens and Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s Unsubmissive France have all postured fraudulently as opponents of Macron’s police law. The Socialist Party has announced that it will be launching a legal challenge against the entire bill.

When it was in power under François Hollande, the Socialist Party significantly expanded police powers, including the enactment of a two-year state of emergency under Hollande, and the suspension of civil liberties, voted for at the time by Mélenchon’s La France Insoumise. Macron’s “global security” law expands police powers in the same direction as pursued under Hollande with La France Insoumise’s support.

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