French police shoot two dead amid growing wave of police murders

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On the night of Thursday, 19 August, police in Vénissieux, a suburb south of Lyon, shot and killed two men during a traffic stop. The passenger, aged 20, was killed instantly; the driver, aged 26, was taken to hospital where he was declared dead on Saturday. After being taken into custody for an interview after the incident, the officers involved in the killing were released without charge on Friday.

According to the police account of the incident, the two men were in a stationary car when they were approached by police. After police had surrounded the car, the driver began to move the vehicle and hit a police officer. Then the other fired eight rounds into the vehicle, killing its two occupants. So far, no witnesses have come forward to verify or contradict the official account. The officer who was allegedly struck by the car did not suffer any serious injuries.

This is the third police shooting of this kind since Macron's re-election on April 24. The first occurred that very night of Macron's re-election, when police killed two occupants of a car on Pont Neuf bridge in central Paris. Then, on the morning of June 4, a passenger was killed after police fired nine rounds into a car in Clignancourt in the north of the city.

After a series of exposures of official accounts of recent acts of police violence, there is little reason to accept the officers' account of the Vénissieux shooting on face value. The accounts of passengers and witnesses in the June 4 killing contradicted the police account of the event, which was very similar to the explanation given for Thursday's shooting. Witnesses of the June shooting claimed that police shot the driver *before* the vehicle began to move forward, not after, as the police claimed.

The official police account of the police rampage against Liverpool fans at the Champions League final in late May was also contradicted by subsequently released evidence. A massive cover-up involving the upper echelons of the police was indicated by the deletion of hours of CCTV from the Stade de France on the night of the final. The affair was so embarrassing for the French government that the chief of Paris police was forced to resign.

It is also highly significant that Vénissieux killing came amid a massive campaign recently initiated by the French state directed against working class areas of Lyon.

The transfer occurred after members of the public intervened to save a man being chased by three plainclothes officers in La Guillotière, a neighborhood of Lyon just 2.5 kilometers north of Vénissieux, at the end of July. The officers were chasing a man accused of petty theft. None of them were seriously injured during the public's intervention.

The incident was the subject of a hysterical campaign by pro-government media denouncing as a "lynching" the intervention of the public to save a man being chased by cops whom residents could not in any way identify as law enforcement officers.

On a trip to Lyon in the aftermath of the incident, Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin deliberately inflamed the situation, stressing the need to "retake control" of the district. As part of these measures, Darmanin sent 70 additional police officers to La Guillotière and added more cops to the newly formed Specialized Field Brigade (BST) unit in Lyon.

In response to this minor incident, the police-initiated a series of roundups in the city. The first saw the arrest of 18 individuals, a number with little connection to the incident in question. A week later, a further round-up involved 10 more arrests. It was in this extremely tense atmosphere that cops shot the two young men dead in

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Vénissieux on Thursday evening.

An official inquest into the officers' actions has been opened but will be under the jurisdiction of the General Inspectorate of the National Police, which itself is a section of the national police answerable to Darmanin.

In response to Thursday's incident, Darmanin made clear that police violence will continue to have the full support of the Macron government. Even before the conclusion of his own minister's investigation, he presented the police account as established fact, denouncing, a "clear [act of] aggression against these police officers … I want to say to all the police and gendarmes of France, who face refusals to obey every day, since there is one every half hour, that I support them *a priori*."

Darmanin's promise of "*a priori*" support for police in the aftermath of deadly violence reiterates the government's unconditional support for the police to shoot and kill individuals with impunity.

In the face of an escalating war with Russia, deepening economic crisis, and mass deaths from the COVID-19 pandemic, the French capitalist state is fast dispensing with the last vestiges of respect for basic democratic rights.

Macron's victory in the April 24 election has only accelerated his efforts to construct a police state in France. Amidst the crisis facing the French and European ruling class the president has vowed to "double" the number of police on the streets.

The French ruling class aims to have at its disposal a police force that is experienced in the use extreme violence against the population. Well-publicized "*a priori*" government support for cops involved in deadly shootings is aimed at normalizing police murder. This is manifestly a preventive measure against the outbreak of protests against Macron's policies of war, slashing living standards through inflation, and mass infection with COVID-19, anticipating an eruption of protests in France and internationally that would eclipse even those of his first term.

In Lyon, the local section of pseudo-left Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Unsubmissive France (LFI) party, part of the New Popular Ecological and Social Union (NUPES), reiterated its support for the Macron government's build-up of the police in response to the shooting.

While a communique from the LFI local 69 called for the abolition of newly introduced specialist BST units, it also stated: "We must significantly increase the training time for police officers, including on carrying weapons. We must also give them more means to investigate and prevent crimes."

The explosion of police violence must be taken as a warning: a crisis-ridden capitalist state, pursuing fundamentally unpopular policies, aims to maintain its grip on power by brute force. The police's role as defenders of the capitalist state mean they cannot be "trained," as LFI claims, to avoid brutality. Police murder is the inevitable outcome of the ruling elite's use of the police as the last line of defense against explosive popular opposition to Macron.

As is the case with all the pandemic, the drive to war, and crippling inflation, police violence can only be ended by a revolutionary movement of the working class.

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