

Police assault protests across France against anti-democratic attack on pensions

Samuel Tissot
16 March 2023

After the French government announced that it would force through the widely opposed pension reform using Article 49.3 of the Constitution without a vote of deputies in the National Assembly, a wave of spontaneous protests broke out across France's major cities. Seventy percent of the population oppose the reform, and around 60 percent support blocking the economy until the government withdraws it.

On Thursday afternoon, French President Emmanuel Macron told his cabinet, before the announcement of the government's decision to pursue Article 49.3 to impose the reform bill, that he could not allow a vote on the law because "the financial and economic risks are too great."

Thursday's protests took place amidst a wave of strikes throughout France's critical sectors which began last week after a series of one-day mobilizations against the reform which have been ongoing since January. Thousands took to the streets in cities across France to express their opposition to Macron's pension cuts.

Macron intends to rely on the violent state security forces to push through his reform, and Thursday's protests were met with police repression in almost every major French city. Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin has augmented personal security for deputies in the National Assembly in the coming days.

In Paris, a protest of tens of thousands occupied the Place de la Concorde on Thursday afternoon. As police began to clear the square, makeshift barricades were temporarily erected by protesters. The square was only cleared by multiple violent charges and the use of tear gas by heavily armed riot police. Water cannon was also used against protesters. According to the police on Thursday night, 73 people were arrested at the Place de la Concorde alone.

After clearing the square, police assault units and gendarmes chased protesters through the center of Paris, assaulting them with gas grenades and batons.

Clashes continued throughout the night in Paris, and multiple fires were lit. Barricades were put in place by protesters along Rue Saint Honoré as protesters marched toward the Élysée Palace, the official residence of the French president. As of midnight, the police announced they had made 217 arrests in Paris.

Scenes of spontaneous protest and police repression were repeated across France's major cities on Thursday evening, although arrest figures outside of Paris were not published as of this writing.

In Toulouse, the Capitole saw a huge protest, which was also dispersed by riot police using tear gas late on Thursday evening. Thousands also protested in Bordeaux.

In Nantes, police also used tear gas to disperse 3,000 protesters, which led to a similar series of makeshift barricades and fires. On Wednesday, Nantes had also been the scene of major clashes between police and protesters which saw 34 arrests. Elsewhere in Brittany, thousands gathered in Brest and Rennes and were dispersed with tear gas.

In Lille, spontaneous protests in the Wazemmes district were tear-gassed by the police. There was also a gathering of thousands at the Place de la République. Thousands gathered in front of the Hôtel de Ville in Le Havre, in Normandy. In Amiens, 1,500 protesters were also dispersed with tear gas.

In the East, there were major protests in Strasbourg, Mulhouse, Dijon and Saint-Étienne. In Lyon, tens of thousands of protesters gathered in the city center before being dispersed with tear gas, amid violent clashes with police.

In the South of France there were major protests in

Montpellier and thousands gathered in central Marseille. Police assaulted both protests with volleys of tear gas. The alleged looting of boutique stores in Marseille has already being seized upon by the bourgeois press to claim that the protests do not reflect popular revulsion toward the reform and the Macron government.

Before Thursday's events, strikes were already underway at French refineries, ports, on the rail networks, amongst waste disposal workers and at the airports. With anger mounting against the whole apparatus of bourgeois political rule in France, including the pro-Macron union bureaucracies, millions of French workers preparing to strike must have the political perspective necessary to take forward the fight.

The movement in France, alongside a nationwide protest strike in Greece, is an especially sharp expression of the current revolutionary situation developing all over Europe. In this context, French workers must break from the bankrupt framework of social dialogue with Macron enforced by the national union bureaucracies and form independent rank-and-file committees to wage a struggle against pension reform and bring down the widely hated Macron government.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact