

French police step up crackdown on protests vs Macron's imposition of pension cuts

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France's major cities have seen a wave of protests since French President Macron announced his use of the anti-democratic article 49.3 to impose his government's hated pension reform on Thursday. A wave of strikes is engulfing France's major industries, including at refineries, airports, waste management facilities and railroads.

Macron rammed through his reform bill over concerns over how a lost vote would impact European financial markets. The reform is viewed as critical by the French bourgeoisie as it will fund a massive €413 billion rearmament of the French military before 2030 and arms deliveries for the war in Ukraine, without increasing tax on the wealthiest sections of society.

The explosive struggle against Macron, the capitalist state, and the war, comes as workers in Sri Lanka, Greece, and the United Kingdom are engaged in massive strikes opposed to low wages and the impacts of decades of austerity.

Throughout Friday and Saturday major protests involving tens of thousands continued all over France. There were protests both nights in Rennes, Nantes, Bordeaux, Lyon, Nice, and Marseille. A planned protest in the Capitole de Toulouse Friday was cancelled as police blocked off all access to the square.

In Paris, on Friday and Saturday night, many thousands of protesters gathered at Place de la Concorde and Place d'Italie. On Friday morning, students gathered at the Tolbiac campus to defend striking garbage workers at Ivry-Sur-Seine. Demonstrations to demand the release of detained protesters continued in the capital across the weekend.

Protesters gather at Place d'Italie on Saturday evening:

Violent police repression Friday and Saturday night confirmed the PES' warnings: the French ruling class has spent the last decade constructing a police state and normalizing state violence to violently crackdown on

independent opposition to capitalist rule. So far at least 600 people have been arrested across Thursday, Friday, and Saturday's protests. This includes Chloé Grace, a journalist from *LeMediaTV* who was arrested while covering Friday evening's protest at the Place de la Concorde.

Macron and his fascistic interior minister Gérald Darmanin, have clearly instructed cops to crack down on protests with extreme violence. Footage captured by journalists on the ground show heavily-armed police suddenly and brutally assaulting peaceful, unarmed protesters. In every major city, cops with full body armor, gas, batons, riot shields and often assault rifles, have kettled protest groups before repeatedly charging and teargassing them.

After dispersing protests on Friday and Saturday, BRAV police motorcycle units scoured the streets of Paris for suspected protesters who had evaded initial arrests. Dozens of arrested protesters near the Place d'Italie on Saturday were lined up against a building with their hands on their heads. On Saturday night, water cannon were used again, while a canine police unit set dogs on protesters in Lyon.

On Saturday, Paris police released an order that all unregistered gatherings in the city would be "dispersed." When protesters began gathering at Place d'Italie for a protest called by the CGT (General Confederation of Labor) union's Île-de-France regional organization, a police statement was released to the media stating, "Due to the presence of many thugs, the organizer calls for dispersal." This illustrates the traitorous role of the union bureaucracy: when called upon by the state, the bureaucracy blames its supporters and excuses their violent repression by the police.

By the end of the night, police had arrested 67 people on Saturday in Paris and 187 across the country.

Arrested protesters lined up:

BRAV-M units hunt protesters:

Popular outrage at Macron's cuts and repression is continuing to grow and protesters are attacking offices of officials favorable to Macron's cruts. On Friday, night protesters in Lyon entered and partially burned the Mayor's office in the 4th district. On Saturday the offices of Eric Ciotti, president of The Republicans party (LR) who previously voted for the reform, were ransacked by protesters in Nice. In multiple cities, effigies of Macron, Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne, and other officials were burned.

Yesterday, the government announced it was stepping up police measures to protect parliamentarians and state officials who support the pension cuts.

The ruling class is scrambling to try to bring the situation back under control, using the services of the union bureaucracies and capitalist political parties. Today a vote of no confidence in the government will be debated in the National Assembly. The vote, whose outcome is expected to depend on whether the right-wing The Republicans votes against Macron's government, is being promoted by the union bureaucracies and the pseudo-left parties as a way to defeat Macron without a struggle against the capitalist system.

Jean Luc Mélenchon's Unsubmissive France (LFI) is showing its true colors as a party of order with extensive ties to the police and state. On Sunday, Mélenchon echoed the media's denunciations of violence by protesters stating, "We who are fighting against this law have a message to send to our friends. Do not make the struggle invisible through practices that would turn against us." He had nothing to say on the violent repression of the French police.

LFI parliamentary leader Michael Bompard called on LR deputies, the majority of whom have supported Macron's pension reform, to vote for the motion of no confidence. He said, "Whatever you think of this reform, what we are asking you is: do you agree with the method [Macron's use of the 49.3]?"

The union leaderships are trying to channel workers back behind bankrupt parliamentary manoeuvres criticizing Macron not for his reform and his release of violence police repression but for not working more closely with the unions and opposition parties to impose his reform.

Speaking to BFM-TV Sunday, CGT union leader Phillippe Martinez declared, "We played our warning role... I do not understand that the government and especially the President of the Republic do not take into

account our alerts." Martinez emphasized that he opposes calls to bring down the Macron government, declaring, "It is not a question of overthrowing the government, but of voting what the deputies could not do last Thursday."

Laurent Berger the head of the CFDT union, ordered striking teachers and protesting students to cut their struggle short, insisting, "You must not interfere with the bac [end-of-high-school exams]."

The ruling class is terrified of the growing prospect of a rank-and-file revolt against the union bureaucracies and an uncontrollable social explosion of strikes and protests. On Sunday, Charles de Courson, a right-wing deputy and finance expert who is leading the motion of no-confidence targeting the Macron government in the National Assembly, warned, "Today, the trade unions tell us that they are not sure of being able to keep control of the troops for long, as we used to say. We began to see the first excesses last night. The risk is that the unions will no longer be able to keep control of the movement."

Courson has been one of the most dedicated servants of capitalist rule in France for over a quarter of a century. Since first being elected in 1993, he has acted as a financial expert for debates over 30 government budget bills, making him one of the principal architects of austerity in France over the last three decades. That such a pillar of reaction as Courson is working with the union leaderships to try to contain and hold back the struggle illustrates the necessity for workers making a complete break with the bureaucracies.

In opposition to them and all pro-capitalist politicians and parties, workers and youth in France must organize rank-and-file committees independently of the nationalist and pro-capitalist unions and form links with their brothers and sisters internationally engaged in the same struggle against austerity and war.



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