

Riots erupt across Paris and France after police murder 17-year-old driver in Nanterre

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Riots erupted for two nights straight in the Paris area and in cities across France, after police shot and killed a 17-year-old driver, Nahel M., claiming he had refused to stop for police on Tuesday morning in the Paris suburb of Nanterre.

The Nanterre prosecutor's office indicated yesterday that it had opened two investigations: one for "refusing to stop" and "attempted voluntary homicide against public authorities," to be carried out by Nanterre police and the local domestic intelligence office, the other for "voluntary homicide by public authorities," by the General Inspectorate of the National Police (IGPN). A passenger in the back seat of the car, also a minor, was held and jailed. A third passenger managed to flee the scene of the police shooting.

Police initially claimed that, sometime between 8:00 and 8:30 a.m., the driver of the vehicle, a rented Mercedes AMG, repeatedly violated traffic laws. As motorcycle-mounted police tried to stop the car, in this version of events, it accelerated towards the cops, threatening to run them over, after which one of the cops fired into the chest of the driver.

The police narrative was soon exposed as a pack of lies, however, by a video that went viral on social media. It showed two cops stopping a yellow car on François Arago Lane in Nanterre. One of the cops, leaning against the windshield, aimed his gun at the driver. When the driver restarted his car, the cop shot the driver at point-blank range from the side of the car. The car ran into a post and stopped a few meters later.

There were reports that the motorcycle cops who stopped and killed Nahel were possibly members of the BRAV (Brigades for the Repression of Violent Action) motorcycle units. These units led violent assaults of mass protesters against Macron's pension cuts this spring.

On Tuesday evening, after the police murder, protesters gathered in front of the Nanterre police office, shouting, "Justice for Nahel" and "Police everywhere, justice nowhere." Interviewed by the daily *Le Parisien*, Yanis, a protester in front of Nanterre city hall, declared, "We already basically hated the police, and this just confirms it. We are angry, we do not understand, what happened to Nahel was all out of proportion, and we are outraged."

Later that night, riots spread across much of the Paris area and cities across the country, including Toulouse, Roubaix and Colmar, during the night of Tuesday to Wednesday. Protesters gathered in the suburbs of Nanterre, Clichy-sous-Bois, Asnières and Colombes and broke into municipal buildings in Nanterre and Mantes-la-Jolie and set them on fire.

Yesterday, the lawyer for Nahel's family, Yassine Bouzrou, said his clients were suing the police for "voluntary homicide" and "preparing false public documents." Bouzrou said, "The first account that was given was a lie, and was published through normal channels in a police report."

French police authorities initially tried to brazen it out, defending as many of their lies against Nahel as they could in the face of mounting public outrage. On Wednesday morning, Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin denounced "urban violence" concentrated in the Hauts-de-Seine department around Nanterre, and appealed for calm. He reported that police had carried out 31 arrests, and that there had been "24 policemen wounded" and "around 40 cars burned" together with an annex to city hall in Mantes-la-Jolie.

The Paris police prefect's office, which has served as the principal accomplice of the Interior Ministry in the repression of strikes and also of the "yellow vest" protests against French President Emmanuel Macron,

initially refused to indict the cop who shot Nahel.

“This action is surprising,” claimed Paris Police Prefect Laurent Nuñez. “There was a first refusal to stop for a police stop, then a police search during which a shot was fired. The inquiry must shed full light on the circumstances of the police stop, what happened just before, and what happened inside the car. We must respect the presumption of innocence. If there was a mistake, it will be sanctioned.”

Authorities were forced to rapidly change their tune, however, amid mounting public outrage over the police murder documented on camera. Internationally known French actor Omar Sy and football stars including Paul Pogba and Kylian Mbappé denounced the murder, with Mbappé tweeting: “France hurts. This situation is unacceptable. All my thoughts go to the family and friends of Nahel, an angel who left us far too early.”

Prime Minister Élisabeth Borne and then Macron himself both issued hypocritical statements to try to distance themselves from the murder of Nahel. “Today there is shock, mourning, and anger. The justice system must respond,” declared Borne, who added, “The shocking images that have been broadcast show an intervention that manifestly does not seem to conform to the rules of engagement of our security forces.”

Later on, Macron himself issued a brief appeal for calm. “Nothing justifies the death of a youth,” he said, saying the police killing was “inexplicable and inexcusable,” but calling for “calm everywhere” and to avoid “going up in flames.” The Interior Ministry then announced that 2,000 heavily armed riot police would be mobilized in the Paris area Wednesday night.

Riots escalated last night, however, in cities including Paris, Lyon, Lille, Toulouse, Bordeaux and Rennes, with even Macron’s massive police deployment overwhelmed by the riots. Youth faced off against the police forces shooting rubber bullets and tear gas, and fired back with fireworks and Molotov cocktails.

Rioting spread across the entire Paris area, with youth storming and burning police stations in suburbs of Trappes, Neuilly-sur-Marne and Dammarie-lès-Lys. Rioting also broke out in the 14th, 15th and 19th districts of downtown Paris.

Sirens sounded as protesters tried to storm a major Paris-area prison at Fresnes and set fire to the gates of the prison.

The explosion of anger against this police murder

reflects the terrific class tensions tearing apart French and European society, and the deep discrediting of the Macron government after he rammed through his pension cuts in the face of mass protests and overwhelming popular opposition. It is broadly sensed that Macron oversees an illegitimate government that rules against the people and with contempt for basic democratic rights.

Macron’s claim that Nahel’s murder is “inexplicable” is a political lie. It is in reality the product of his brutal policies in defense of the capitalist class. He has stoked the most violently reactionary moods among fascistic cops to cultivate them as a social base against the working class. Throughout Macron’s presidency, these police units have been used to brutally repress mass working class opposition to his attacks on basic social and democratic rights, and his policy of diverting billions of euros in social spending to NATO rearmament and war with Russia.

The Macron government decorated police units that carried out outrages like the killing of 80-year-old Zineb Redouane at her window by shooting her in the face with a tear gas canister, and the violent assault on a 76-year-old woman, Geneviève Legay, during the “yellow vest” protests. It is the constant official promotion by the government itself of police violence against the people that has produced the outrageous murder of Nahel.

As during the struggle against the French pension cuts this spring, the only way forward is a struggle by the working class to bring down Macron.



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