

Macron's police state launches brutal crackdown on French protesters

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Clashes between protesters and police continued throughout France over the weekend, following the police murder of 17-year-old Nahel M. in the Parisian suburb of Nanterre last Tuesday. On Sunday evening, President Emmanuel Macron held an emergency cabinet meeting in response to the ongoing crisis.

Not only the killing but also the attempt of officers involved to cover up the murder as self-defence—before a video of the incident showed they shot the youth at point-blank range under no threat to their life—has led to a massive outpouring of anger across France and internationally.

On Saturday, Nahel's funeral was held in Nanterre attended by thousands of peaceful protesters.

Violent clashes across France saw 1,300 people arrested on Friday night and then a further 719 on Saturday night. This crackdown follows the arrest of thousands by the French police during Macron's anti-democratic implementation of his pension cut this spring.

Major French cities have been besieged by a heavily armed police force equipped with helicopters, armoured cars, and "anti-riot" firearms. On Friday, Saturday and Sunday night 45,000 police were mobilized nationally with an additional 7,000 sent to Paris each night as reinforcements.

Over the weekend specialized RAID units, which occupy neighbourhoods with armoured cars, were deployed to Marseille and Lyon. The infamous BRAV-M units which provoked and terrorized demonstrators in Paris in April during the protests against Macron's pension reform were also deployed.

Despite the Macron government's efforts to censor evidence of police violence on social media, videos show violent police charges against mostly defenceless protesters. Other videos show police efforts to prevent journalists from recording the clashes.

Pitched battles between cops and mostly youthful

protesters occurred in many French cities. Police stations were set on fire in the towns of Nemours, Pau and Combs-la-Ville. Public buildings throughout Paris, Marseille, and Lille were set ablaze. In the northern Parisian suburb of Aubervilliers, a bus station burned down with 12 buses destroyed. Groups in Lyon raided a police vehicle carrying weapons and live ammunition which has not yet been retrieved.

On Friday and Saturday night the tram and bus services throughout France were cancelled from 9 p.m. onwards on the order of Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin. This was expanded to the Paris Metro service on Sunday. Over the weekend, in Lille, Marseille and Lyon, public transport was cancelled and meeting in groups was banned from the late afternoon onwards. Similar measures were taken in smaller towns throughout the territory that saw clashes earlier in the week.

Anger against police repression and social conditions spread to Belgium and Switzerland. In the Swiss city of Lausanne seven people were arrested on Saturday night. The French overseas territories of Réunion and French Guyana also saw significant clashes. Reflecting international nervousness over the situation in France, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz stated he was "watching with concern."

One incident that gives an insight into the popular hatred of France's capitalist politicians came in the small town of L'Hay-Les-Roses where a burning car was pushed into the driveway of a local mayor, a member of the right-wing Les Républicains political party. French Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne rushed to the scene and publicly assured officials that the government and police would protect them from their constituents.

There has been a significant effort by the Macron government to deny the overtly political nature of these protests, which follow directly from the pension cut struggle. On Saturday Macron stated, "We've seen

violent gatherings organized on several [social media platforms]—but also a kind of mimicry of violence... living the video games that have intoxicated them.”

This echoes Macron’s statement during the Yellow Vest protests when he blamed Facebook for the massive opposition to his presidency.

Government spokesperson Olivier Véran later attempted to portray the protests as the work of apolitical and hardened criminals: “There is no political message here. When you loot a Foot Locker, Lacoste or Sephora store, there is no political message. It’s looting.”

If youth in France feel they must resort to violence to express their dissatisfaction it is not due to social media or video games, but the horrific social conditions in which they live and the lack of political alternatives offered by the established political parties. In the suburbs of Paris, Lyon and Marseille where the most violent clashes have been concentrated, poverty and unemployment are endemic.

The reality facing youth in working-class areas is one with no jobs, no access to quality education, and under continuous harassment—if not deadly threat as in the case of Nahel—at the hands of the cops. As was shown in their treacherous role in the struggle against the pension reform, the pseudo-left parties and the union bureaucracies which claim to oppose Macron offer no real opposition to the capitalist system which has condemned these young men and women to lives of poverty.

The mass arrests over the weekend came after the fascistic joint statement of the police unions published Friday declaring, “we are at war” and threatening to “put those we arrest out of action.” The joint communiqué continued, “Faced with these savage hordes, asking for calm is no longer enough, we must impose it. ... [it is time] for combat against these vermin.”

Significant sections of the French political class have fully solidarized themselves with the police’s “war” against “vermin” and demanded an even harsher response. In a video address on Sunday far-right leader Marine Le Pen lambasted the “anarchy” in France and called on authorities to declare a state of emergency or curfew. Leader of the conservative Les Républicains Eric Ciotti stated, “I support the police with all my force, the gendarmes and those that command them.”

Both denounced Jean Luc Mélenchon, leader of the pseudo-left NUPES alliance. Ciotti called him “a danger to the republic” because Mélenchon had described the police as “uncontrolled,” a huge understatement following months of violent repression against peaceful

protests and the attempt to cover up the brutal killing of a 17-year-old boy.

Mélenchon is anything but a danger to the capitalist Fifth Republic, which he propped up through the 2022 election crisis and the struggle against Macron’s pension reform. He represents a wing of the bourgeoisie fearful of the social reaction that the brazen criminality of the police and their political sponsors may provoke, while remaining organically hostile to the social aspirations of the working class.

His response to the crisis has not been to call for the bringing down of the Macron government and its police state, but to produce a toothless “emergency declaration” whose principal demands are better training for the police and the formation of a series of independent oversight commissions. The absurd notion that an ultra-violent force of police officers who declare themselves “at war” with “vermin” can be “reformed” is another example of the political bankruptcy of the French pseudo-left.

The aftermath of the George Floyd protests, where the US Democratic Party solidarized themselves with anti-police violence protesters only to massively increase the funding and militarization of the police after Biden came to office, should be a warning to the French population that neither Mélenchon nor any other bourgeois politician will launch a struggle against the police or the capitalist system they defend.

The Parti de l’égalité socialiste calls for the construction of rank-and-file committees independent of the pseudo-left parties and the pro-Macron union bureaucracies. Only a mass mobilization of the French and European working class can defend workers and youth from police violence and bring down the hated Macron government.



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