

After the youth protests in France: Macron strengthens fascist forces

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6 July 2023

French president Emmanuel Macron and his Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne have reacted to the anti-police protests that have gripped the country since the police murder of 17-year-old Nahel M in Nanterre last week by deliberately strengthening far-right and fascist forces within the state and in French politics.

Neither the President nor the Prime Minister distanced themselves from the police union's inflammatory claims that they are at "war" with "these savage hordes". Instead Macron and Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin visited police chiefs on Monday night to express their total support.

They mobilized up to 45,000 police officers per night, who, in riot gear and heavily armed, took action against the rebelling youths, many of whom were minors. More than 4,000 were arrested within a week.

Last Friday, Justice minister Eric Dupond-Moretti sent out a circular to prosecutors demanding a "rapid, firm and systematic response" against those arrested and, if they are minors, against their parents. "It's not the State that educates children, but their parents", the minister told journalists. Mothers or fathers who are judged to have "compromised the health, safety, morals or education of their minor child" could face up to two years in jail and tens of thousands of euros in fines. Before, president Macron had called for "all parents to take responsibility."

Dupond-Moretti's circular advised the prosecutors, that, "in addition to the usual qualifications for offences against persons and property," the offence could include "rebellion, participation in a group with a view to preparing violence or damage, and participation in a demonstration while carrying a weapon". He put particular emphasis on violence against law enforcement officers.

Since then, courts have begun to try defendants in summary proceedings. Up to 30 people a day are tried by a single court. Those who maintain their innocence remain in pre-trial detention until a regular trial takes place.

In a speech to the National Assembly on Tuesday Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne fully supported this course, stating that "heavy sentences have been pronounced" and that the government is also investigating whether "criminal sanctions can be made against parents who let their children... hang out in the evening and set fire to our town halls and police stations."

The events in France over the last week have revealed the

deep-seated popular hatred felt toward the ruling class and its political representatives. Over 300 banks and 220 local government buildings were damaged by protesters. Initial estimates for the damage caused by the clashes are upwards of 1 billion euros.

The protests were concentrated on the banlieues, the poor suburbs. In total, there are 1300 residential areas in France classified by the government as *quartiers prioritaires*. They are home to 5.4 million people, 40 percent of whom are under 25. Half of those under 18 live below the poverty line.

There had already been protests against the appalling conditions in the banlieues in 2005. The then interior minister and later president Nicolas Sarkozy had threatened to clean up the banlieues with a "kärcher" (a high pressure cleaner). Since then, every government – whether conservative or "socialist" – has made conditions worse. Instead of social improvements, there were more police who systematically terrorized the youth. In 2017 the government of President François Hollande, a member of the Socialist Party, passed a law that allowed police to use weapons not only for self-defense, but also when someone refused to follow police instructions.

It is well known that there are numerous supporters of the far-right Rassemblement National of Marine Le Pen and of fascist organizations in the police force. Interior Minister Darmanin is himself a former member of the far-right Action Française political group.

Since the police murder of Nahel M, far-right forces are openly mobilizing in support of the police officer who shot him in cold blood. A crowdfunding site in support of the police officer raised more than €1.3 million before being shut down. More than 70,000 people contributed. The fund was launched by far-right journalist Jean Messiha, a supporter of the Islamophobic presidential candidate Eric Zemmour.

It is these fascist forces that are mobilized and encouraged by the Macron government. In her speech to the National Assembly on Tuesday Prime Minister Borne denounced Jean-Luc Mélenchon's pseudo-left Unsubmissive France (LFI) in terms similar to those of the fascists.

She accused Mélenchon of "rejecting all calls for calm," "pouring fuel on the fire" and "instrumentalizing" Nahel's murder. "When your leader speaks of a license to kill for the

police, of the death penalty for young people in the neighborhoods and calls us a watchdog, you are stepping outside the republican field”, she accused the LFI deputies.

A few days earlier the leader of the far-right, Marine Le-Pen, tweeted that LFI was a political party “which clearly calls for disorder and violence.” Eric Zemmour, speaking on CNews on Saturday, stated “We are between riots and war, these are ethnic riots that could transform themselves into a civil war.” He continued, “Jean-Luc Mélenchon is a danger for France...he is the incarnation of this electorate which wants to bring down and islamize France.”

Fabien Roussel, the National Secretary of the increasingly ultra-nationalist and pro-cop French Communist Party, joined in the far-right attacks against Mélenchon, stating “I totally disassociate myself from the words of Jean-Luc Mélenchon and the deputies who refuse to call for calm and legitimize this urban violence.”

These fascistic remarks whipped up far-right mobs to join the police’s assault on protesters. Known far-right vigilantes were attacking protesters in Lorient, Angers, Chambéry and Lyon. Two protesters in Angers were hospitalized after being assaulted by a group of masked men wielding baseball bats and iron bars.

In the western French town of Lorient, masked men in civilian clothes, who were beating up protesting youths, were identified as members of a naval unit of the French Navy. The police let them go. According to the local newspaper *Le Telegramme*, a police officer explained that the officers allowed the “counter rioters” to intervene “because they were helping us.” They had acted “a little too harshly”, he admitted.

The real target of the Macron government and far-right politicians is not Mélenchon, but the working class. Mélenchon is known to be a loyal servant of the capitalist state. He was a member of the government of Lionel Jospin, that left office only three years before the 2005 protests in the banlieues erupted.

Mélenchon’s muted criticism of police violence is aimed at shoring up confidence in the police. He is not proposing to mobilise the working class against police violence and in defense of oppressed youth, but to “reform” a police force that is infested with fascists by providing better training and more equipment.

The youth protests in the banlieues followed the protests of the Yellow Vests and protests against pension cuts, which were opposed by 80 percent of the population and saw violent repression against millions of protesters. The Macron government knows that the pension struggle was just a prologue for future struggles against the capitalist state

The deliberate strengthening of far-right and fascistic forces by the Macron government is not only directed against the youth in the banlieues, but against the working class as a whole. As the WSWs explained in a statement on the protests: “Workers cannot leave the youth to fight on their own. All the

actions of the government, which are acquiring an ever more reckless and authoritarian character, will be directed at every manifestation of opposition to the dictates of the corporations and the financial elite.”

Confronted with growing social opposition, the “president of the rich” reaches for fascism and is whipping up a frenzy against all left-wing opposition to his agenda of austerity and war.

The explosive – and destructive – form of the youth protests against police violence and Macron’s presidency is explained by the intersection of massive social anger that exists amongst French youth and workers on the one hand, and the lack of a revolutionary political perspective on the other.

After months of bitter struggle against Macron’s pension cut and majority support for a general strike to defeat the president, the struggle was shut down by the trade union bureaucracies and their supporters in the pseudo-left parties. Feeling that the traditional political parties will only betray their struggle, the current riots are the only way the youth feel they can express their anger.

The Macron government’s unrelenting backing for its fascistic police force following their murder of an innocent 17-year-old boy exposes again the reality facing the working class in France and Europe. Under conditions of severe economic crisis and its search for funds to support its imperialist war against Russia in Ukraine, the French ruling class is constructing a police state as it moves rapidly to authoritarianism and dictatorship.

The only way police violence and austerity can be opposed is through mobilizing the working class on an international, socialist program and building the Parti de l’égalité socialiste as its new leadership. The PES proposes the construction of rank-and-file committees of workers independently of the traitorous union bureaucracies and their pseudo-left appendages. These committees must be mobilized to bring down the Macron government through a general strike and prepare to form the basis of a transfer of state power to the working class.



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