

Lutte Ouvrière covers up police repression of French riot protests

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The French pseudo-left group Lutte Ouvrière (LO, Workers' Struggle) has reacted to the recent riots sparked by the killing of 17-year-old Nahel M by police in the Paris suburb of Nanterre on June 27 by denouncing the working-class youth involved.

The regime of President Emmanuel Macron responded to the revolt of workers and youth by mobilizing 45,000 heavily armed police in a crackdown on protests. Soon after the outbreak of riots, the police unions declared that they were at “war” with “these savage hordes.” With the vocal support of the National Rally of Marine Le Pen, the police, aided by far-right elements, repressed the protests brutally.

More than 4,000 people, mostly teenagers, were arrested during a week-long protest. The government sent out a circular to state prosecutors demanding a “rapid, firm and systematic response” against those arrested and, if they are minors, against their parents. Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne threatened, “If the existing legal framework is not sufficient, then, if need be, we’ll change the law.”

LO has lined up behind this state repression, denouncing not the fascistic police force and its violent crackdown but the revolting youth for causing significant property damage in French suburbs.

In an editorial published July 5, “Hope is neither in resignation nor in destructive violence”, LO’s spokeswoman Nathalie Arthaud writes, “The destructive fury that has hit some neighbourhoods is causing consternation, dismay and even anger. And for good reason! It is not the bourgeois who see their car, their fancy restaurant or their tennis or golf course go up in smoke. It is the women and men of the working classes who find themselves destitute without a social centre, without a shop for their shopping, without transport to get to work.”

Arthaud makes sinister remarks echoing the police line that France’s banlieues (estates) are strewn with those who know nothing but crime.

She writes, “The actions of those who spent several nights smashing everything they had within their reach, including the holiday center where their little sister was enrolled, or

the medical bus where their mother was going for treatment, testify to a dramatic lack of awareness. Among them are also petty thugs and traffickers, who do not care a lot about putting the lives of the inhabitants in danger.”

Opposing the politically futile method of rioting does not change the fact that they are a desperate response by the most poverty-stricken and politically repressed sections of workers and youth to years of attacks by the Macron government, with its fascistic police force acting as frontline troops.

In conditions where the police murdered an unarmed youth in cold blood and then repressed protesters using grenades, rubber bullets, and even armoured cars, accusing protesters of placing “the lives of the inhabitants in danger” is an absurd pro-cop slander.

LO’s response to the riots reveals that in the struggle between poverty-stricken working-class youth and the billionaire class’s capitalist state, it is firmly on the side of the latter. This exposes LO’s claimed adherence to Trotskyism as a fraud. LO ranks among the “contemptible eunuchs” Trotsky refers to in his work *Their Morals and Ours*, who cry foul at the violence of the oppressed in their struggle against their oppressors:

“A slave-owner who through cunning and violence shackles a slave in chains, and a slave who through cunning or violence breaks the chains—let not the contemptible eunuchs tell us they are equals before a court of morality.”

In the same article, Arthaud asks, “How to get respect from the police?” While the police murder these impoverished youth and denounce them as savage hordes, LO encourages the working class youth to reflect on how they can earn the respect of the capitalist state’s armed guards!

LO blames the riots on “thugs and traffickers” to cover up its own role in creating the political conditions that now exist in France. If working class youth feel the only way they can oppose austerity and police violence is through rioting, it is because they know that the unions, and their pseudo-left backers in parties such as LO, will do everything

in their power to suppress their struggle.

The riots came in the wake of mass protests and strikes by millions of workers, lasting more than four months, against Macron's pension cuts. Millions of French workers and youth have passed through the experience of the pro-capitalist trade unions bureaucracies and their petty-bourgeois political hangers-on strangling this movement, even though more than three-quarters of the population opposed the pension reform and two-thirds were in favour of blocking the economy with a general strike to defeat Macron.

LO's role in this betrayal does not prevent Arthaud from cynically proclaiming that "the destructive revolt of this youth is the consequence of the absence of organization of the workers' camp, of its lack of combativeness and politicization."

This is a contemptible lie. Contrary to LO's claims, there is massive social anger, manifested in the recent explosion of youth protests against the Macron regime and police violence, and during the strikes against the pension reform. However, workers and youth feel that pseudo-left organisations, like LO, and the unions they prop up offer no way forward.

LO is rooted in the state- and corporation-funded national union bureaucracies and their bankrupt framework of negotiations with Macron. It is organically hostile to any revolutionary perspective. Instead of mobilizing workers and youth in a fight to bring down Macron, it plays a sinister role in creating political confusion in the working class and channels all opposition behind the trade unions.

The youth revolt against police repression has exposed the bankruptcy of LO and other pseudo-left forces such as La France Insoumise of Jean-Luc Mélenchon and the New Anti-Capitalist party. Although these organizations have received millions of votes in elections and have several thousand members, they oppose the independent mobilization of the working class against austerity policies and NATO's war in Ukraine presided over by the Macron government in alliance with the union bureaucracies.

Amid escalating war and the resurgence of class struggles in France and across the world, this objectively revolutionary situation exposes the class gulf that separates the Parti de l'égalité socialiste (PES), the French section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), from a whole milieu of middle-class and pseudo-left groups.

The police crackdown following the murder of Nahel M has confirmed the warning made by PES during the mass workers' protest against pension cuts. The PES explained that if Macron governs against the will of the people, the only way forward for workers is to launch a vast grassroots

political mobilization against Macron. Its aim must be to prepare for a general strike to bring down Macron and abolish the French presidency and its draconian powers.

This requires the formation of rank-and-file committees, independent from the various trade union bureaucracies, among workers and youth at factories, workplaces and in working-class neighbourhoods to lead and broaden the political struggle to bring down the Macron regime.

Capitalism is in the midst of a mortal crisis, no less severe than the one it faced when Hitler was preparing for war in Europe and Trotsky was founding the Fourth International in 1938. The struggle for democratic and social rights, which the bourgeoisie is attacking internationally in line with the economic crisis and its drive to war, requires the unification of the working class at an international level based on a revolutionary socialist perspective.

LO is a descendent of the centrist Barta group which proclaimed its sympathy with Trotskyism in words but refused to join the Fourth International to fight for its international revolutionary perspective. Eighty-five years later, LO's continued rejection of revolutionary internationalism leads it to defend the repression of the capitalist state.

As workers across Europe enter struggles against austerity and the escalation of war, the historic program of Trotskyism defended by the ICFI is more relevant than ever. Fighting for this program means rejecting the reformist, demoralized, anti-Trotskyist positions of pseudo-left organizations like LO, and workers and young people turning to building the revolutionary leadership of the PES.



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