

French unions hold nationwide protest against police violence

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On Saturday, 15,000 people in Paris and 80,000 across France took part in an “antiracist” protest called by to the CGT (General Confederation of Labor) union. It was the first nationwide protest called by the French union bureaucracies since the mass strikes against President Emmanuel Macron’s pension cuts this spring, and the nationwide rioting this summer after the police murder of 17-year-old Nahel.

The riots followed the bureaucracies’ shut-down of strikes against Macron, even though over 60 percent of French people wanted a general strike. Union leaders isolated striking industries and stopped calling protests, while French Democratic Confederation of Labor (CFDT) leader Laurent Berger warned of ‘insanity’ he claimed was seizing France. This allowed Macron to unleash heavily-armed riot police to assault protests and impose cuts to fund his planned increase in military spending amid the NATO-Russia war in Ukraine.

Even after the CFDT and CGT bureaucracies sabotaged these struggles, there is deep-rooted anger against Macron’s authoritarian presidency and police-state machine among workers and youth. This year, over 8,000 people were arrested and dozens injured or maimed by police weapons.

WSWS journalists who intervened in the Paris protests interviewed Santiago, who had joined the Yellow Vests in 2018. He said that he came to protest against “against the police repression we have experienced recently, particularly through the case of the young man (Nahel) who was killed. It is serious what is happening now ...”

Santiago pointed to the link between police repression in France and Macron’s arming and funding of neo-Nazis in Ukraine: “We know very well that there are Nazi corpscles, Nazi battalions [in Ukraine]. It must be denounced, it must be said. And it's true that

our media, in general, minimise this kind of thing. It's true that Putin is a hateful person, there's no problem. But on the other side too, there are things that we must denounce. And that's precisely what freedom of the press is all about: being able to say everything and not just the things that interest certain States.”

He added, “It is true that helping Ukraine is in fact maintaining the war. The military solution is not the solution. It's death on both sides.”

Amine, a Moroccan youth who came to protest French support for the Israeli state’s attacks on Palestinians, told the WSWS: “France is supposed to be a democracy but it [shows it] is not by trying to silence these struggles. However, this just delays the explosion of the people, and I believe there is a lot of anger which has been buried for quite some time and is now increasingly being expressed.”

He also spoke on French imperialism’s role in Africa, stating, “African people are fed up and want to be free. France is still partly responsible for the situation in Libya [referring to the massive floods in Derna caused by infrastructure neglected since the NATO instigated 2011 war in Libya]. French imperialism has done a lot of damage to Africa, and it is a shame that today France does not recognise its wrongs and does not completely disengage from Africa.”

Such expressions of the growing opposition of workers and youth to imperialist war abroad and police-state repression has an entirely different class character and political orientation from the union bureaucracies’ call to oppose police violence on the basis of opposing racism. This is part of the continuing efforts of the French union bureaucracies and allied pseudo-left parties to present police violence as mainly an issue of race, not class.

There were thus a number of slogans at the protest

calling to “reform the police” and dealing with acts of police violence against workers and youth as the product of racist violence against minority ethnic populations in France. This was the position defended by Jean-Luc Mélenchon of the pseudo-left Unsubmissive France party during the mass youth riots following the police murder of Nahel.

Racist sentiment is undoubtedly rife within the French police, large sections of which vote for neo-fascist parties, and racism may have played a role in the murder of Nahel. However, police repression does not only target blacks, Arabs or other minority ethnic groups; it is meted out to opposition among workers and youth of all racial and ethnic backgrounds. French police brutally repressed “yellow vest” protests, which found their principal base of support among majority-white rural and suburban communities.

Similarly, this year, Macron sent out armed police squads to force striking refinery and garbage workers, who also are of many different racial or ethnic origins, to go back to work.

Police violence is ultimately rooted in the violence of the capitalist ruling class against the workers and youth. The French police enforces Macron’s diktat against the working class, because his government’s policies of imperialist war abroad must be funded by attacks on the working class at home that provoke overwhelming popular opposition. The struggle against police violence is therefore rooted in the struggle to bring down Macron’s authoritarian presidency.

Insofar as France’s bourgeois police-state is left intact because of the counter-revolutionary policies of the union bureaucracies and of Mélenchon, the epidemic of police violence will only intensify. Youth who want to fight against racism and police violence must understand that both are ultimately manifestations of class society, and that they can only be opposed by a conscious, international struggle against capitalism and imperialist war.

There is mounting opposition among youth and workers to the union bureaucracies who have worked to suppress a revolutionary mobilization of the working class against Macron’s authoritarian presidency. The “social dialogue” of the Macron government with the trade union bureaucracies and their pseudo-left political allies is ever more deeply discredited.

Elia, a high school student spoke to the WSWS,

discussing the role of the union bureaucracies in the pension struggle. She said, “In fact, they are the ones responsible, as they just ask the people to shut up and accept this.”

She also criticised the bureaucracies for denouncing workers who went on strike and youth who occupied their universities and high-schools in solidarity with calls for a general strike against Macron. She said, “The actions of the people are caused by the actions of the oppressor. If the people think that it is time to demonstrate in such a way as to shout so loudly and do so many things, it is the fault of the State.”



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