

French police arrest Jews protesting Israel's genocide in Gaza

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On Friday, French police arrested Jean-Claude Meyer, a member of the French Jewish Union for Peace (UJFP), for carrying a Palestinian flag at a Strasbourg protest. Another UJFP member, Perrine, was also arrested and held for an additional 24 hours on Saturday evening. As of Sunday night, it appeared she had not been released. A total of 13 people were arrested at the Strasbourg rally organised in defence of Palestinians as the Israeli state prepares a ground invasion of Gaza.

The rally was banned by the local prefecture in line with the memorandum to police chiefs issued by French Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin. It states: “Pro-Palestinian demonstrations, as they are likely to generate disturbances to public order, must be prohibited,” and “the organization of these prohibited demonstrations must give rise to arrests.”

A UJFP statement after the arrest of Meyer and other protesters pointed to Macron's murderous role in backing Israel's onslaught on Gaza, and the popular anger this has unleashed:

“Faced with the legitimate emotion which pushes a large part of the population—including many young people—to show solidarity with Palestine, which has once again been put under fire since the spiral of murderous violence to which has left civilians once again facing bombing and expulsion out of the Gaza Strip, a distraught power [France] which seems to have lost all measure aligns itself with the Israeli extreme right, refuses to allow the voice of the suffering Palestinians to be heard, and even forbids the slightest sympathy to be publicly expressed for the oppressed!”

The collective also criticized the role of French media in whitewashing the Israeli onslaught and official French support for it. It noted that there is “Not a word in the official media, not a gesture from the authorities in the direction of de-escalation, but on the contrary the expression of contempt for a solidarity movement which ...

is not limited to pro-Palestinian organizations alone.”

By Sunday evening, the only French media outlet to have reported on the arrest of members of the Jewish Union for Peace was France3's Grand-Est regional news page. In pro-Palestinian protests across France at the weekend, hundreds were fined and dozens arrested, although the interior ministry has not yet released official statistics.

At another solidarity protest for Gaza Saturday, police arrested well-known left-wing journalist and former Unsubmissive France (LFI) member Taha Bouhafs. They dragged Bouhafs away from the protest, though he showed them his press credentials and passport. Bouhafs was later released and fined for attending the protest.

In a press conference on Saturday, Darmanin seized on a Chechnyan youth's horrific murder of Dominique Bernard, a teacher at his old high school, to impose more measures to repress political opposition in France, particularly amongst foreign residents. After the attack Friday, the French terror threat level was raised to “emergency attack,” the highest level. Thousands of additional police officers are posted across France.

Darmanin pledged to carry out the “systematic expulsion of any foreigner ... considered dangerous by the intelligence services.” He stated that state agents will be “allow[ed], across all State services, to evaluate people [foreigners] who are in the country, to classify them as being dangerous, and obviously to proceed with their expulsion.”

Darmanin also claimed 189 antisemitic acts had taken place in France since last Saturday, which led to 65 arrests. He also said Pharos, the French government website where online content can be anonymously reported, has received 2,449 complains relating to alleged antisemitic statements or apology for

terrorism online.

Since anyone publicly expressing solidarity for the Palestinian people can be arrested and classified as an antisemite, it is impossible to know how many of these incidents are genuinely antisemitic, and how many are part of state crackdown on pro-Palestinian opposition. It is unclear whether these figures include those arrested at pro-Palestinian protests.

The escalation of the French state's crackdown on political opposition over the weekend reflects the extreme nervousness in ruling circles that their full-throated support for the Israeli massacre of Gazans will reignite the class struggle in France. Next week, further planned protests, including the commemoration of the 200-300 Algerians killed by police in the massacre of Paris in 1961, have been banned by the Interior Ministry.

Jean-Claude Meyer and other arrested pro-Palestinian protesters are political prisoners. They were not committing any crime and were arrested only for peaceful political expression. A domestic situation in which Jews are transformed into political prisoners for speaking out against genocide points to the extremely advanced preparations in the ruling class to impose a fascist police state.

Meyer's arrest exposes the reactionary political lie that the Israeli state represents the interests of all Jews around the world. On the contrary, principled expressions of Jewish solidarity for the Palestinian people in Israel, the United States and France have shown the broad opposition in the Jewish population to the brutal policies of the Israeli regime.

In the last two decades and under successive governments of all political colorations, the French ruling class has systematically built up a fascist police state. One facet of this campaign has been the promotion of the far-right National Rally (RN) of Marine Le Pen, a party that descends from the Nazi-collaborationist Vichy-French regime. Another has been the emergence of a unanimous official consensus in favor of police repression.

Macron's interior minister, Darmanin, a sympathiser of the far-right royalist Action Française, personifies the fascist evolution of the French ruling class. His sympathies for the Action Française, founded in 1899 to support the jailing of innocent Jewish officer Alfred Dreyfus and that became a key ideological backer of collaboration with Nazism in World War II, led him once in office to denounce kosher and halal food.

In a televised debate before last year's presidential election, he attacked neo-fascist leader Marine Le Pen from the right, as "soft" on Islam.

In 2021, Darmanin led the state campaign for the Anti-Separatism law, which amongst its other anti-democratic provisions, requires France's 8 million Muslims to abide by "national cohesion" and "public order." This is being extended to anyone who opposes Macron's support for the Israeli state as it massacres the Gazan population before the entire world.

French police arrests of Jews opposed to the Israeli state's genocidal onslaught on Palestinians in the Gaza Strip exposes the lie that its banning of Gaza solidarity protests aims to protect Jewish people. Rather, it aims to protect the French police state from mounting popular opposition, including to its support for the Israeli regime's policies of mass murder.

Macron's massively unpopular government is maintained in power through imperialist war abroad and police repression at home. It has devoted billions of euros to supporting a fascist-infested regime in Ukraine in a war with Russia, and an unprecedented program of rearmament in France itself. It rules against the people, weathering mass strikes against his overwhelmingly unpopular pension cuts only through a combination of police violence and the support of a compliant union bureaucracy. Ruling circles clearly fear that the eruption of opposition to genocide in Gaza can blow this rotten political edifice apart.

The arrest of Meyer amid the onslaught against Gaza must serve as a warning to all workers, youth and socialist-minded intellectuals who remember the crimes of the French collaboration with Nazism. As in the 1940s, the capitalist system has entered into a mortal political crisis. Opposition to it must take the form of an international, revolutionary movement of the working class, acting independently of corrupt national labor bureaucracies, in a struggle for socialism.



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