

French police ban and assault pro-Gaza protest: 21 arrested, 1,500 fined in Paris

Our reporters

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On Saturday, thousands marched in central Paris to protest against the Israeli onslaught against Gaza and the support of the Macron government for this genocidal campaign. On the preceding Friday evening, hundreds of people had also gathered at the Place de la République at an impromptu pro-Palestinian protest.

The repression of protests in France comes as pro-Gaza demonstrations continue across Europe and the world. On Saturday, major pro-Palestinian marches also continued in London, Berlin and Rome, Copenhagen, and Stockholm. On Sunday, thousands joined a march in Madrid.

While the State Council struck down a blanket ban on all pro-Palestine protests in France proposed by Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin, police prefects still in practice are free to ban protests at will, by declaring them a credible threat to public order. Even if they attend a legal protest in France, moreover, protesters face the constant threat of being arrested for “apology for terrorism” for as little as carrying a Palestinian flag.

Despite these legal threats, a pro-Palestine protest was organised in the Châtelet area of central Paris on Saturday at 2:30 p.m. After initially being banned by Paris police chief Laurent Nunez on Thursday, a legal appeal was mounted by the organisers. In a blatant attempt to justify the planned crackdown on the protest, the Paris tribunal announced that the ban against the protest would be upheld *only one hour* before it was to begin.

With this fabricated legal justification in hand, the Paris police brutally suppressed the peaceful protest. Heavily armed police beat and charged protesters. Large groups of protesters were dispersed with tear gas, whilst smaller groups isolated off from the main protest were then kettled and held for hours in the pouring rain,

before being fined *en masse*. International rugby fans in Paris for the Rugby World Cup final on Saturday evening were also caught up in the police cordons.

By the end of the evening, 21 people had been arrested and 1,487 people received 135 euro fines, which amounts to 200,000 euros in revenue for the Paris authorities! Receiving a fine in France also requires the registration of photo identification and a home address, meaning everyone fined will be listed on police registries.

Saturday’s arrests and fines are part of a wider campaign to criminalise political opposition in France and across Europe.

Over 200 people have been arrested for unspecified acts of antisemitism since the Palestinian breakout on October 7. This included the head of the French Jewish Union for Peace for organising a pro-Palestinian protest in Strasbourg. The New Anti-capitalist Party and Danièle Obono, a deputy for Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s Unsubmissive France, have had legal cases opened against them for “apology for terrorism” for their opposition to the French government’s full throated support for Israel.

Darmanin has also threatened foreign nationals who protest against the ongoing genocide in Gaza.

He continued his public denunciations of French footballer Karim Benzema, going as far as to question his right to have a political opinion at all. During a visit to Abu Dhabi on Wednesday, he said, “We can ask ourselves what a footballer is doing by tweeting a political opinion and that, when he [Benzema] does it, he does it selectively. ... I personally think that he hides something and not to see it is to be naive.”

Last week, the Interior Minister accused the footballer of being linked to the Muslim Brotherhood. Benzema’s initial tweet simply pointed out the Israeli

bombings do not “spare women and children.”

Footballers from Muslim-majority countries are being targeted across Europe. In an ominous example, Dutch footballer Anwar El Ghazi had his contract with German football club Mainz terminated for refusing to apologise for an Instagram post stating “[the Israeli onslaught is] not a conflict and it’s not a war. This is genocide and mass destruction and we’re witnessing it happen live.”

The public pursuit of sport stars for expressing solidarity and support for the Palestinian people is aimed at creating an atmosphere of intimidation across the whole of European society as capitalist governments across the continent fully back Israel’s genocidal campaign in the Gaza Strip.

The WSWS spoke to students at universities in Paris who denounced the genocidal campaign against the Gazans and repression of pro-Palestinian protests in France.

Sophie said: “This must stop, a genocide is taking place. Many barriers have been crossed by the Israeli government that show, as do their public statements as well, that their intention is to destroy the population of Gaza.”

She rejected the French government’s argument that all opposition to the Israeli government’s war on the Palestinian people is necessarily antisemitic and dictated by hatred of the Jewish people. She said, “This is an amalgam. One can be against the actions of this government without being antisemitic, and while feeling solidarity for both peoples.”

Pedro, a Spanish scientific worker at a university in Paris, told the WSWS: “I am very disappointed that many demonstrations are being banned in France ... I am very disappointed with many countries in Europe right now, because they are not working for human rights in Gaza right now. When I was visiting Germany, I went to the concentration camps and I felt that they had understood nothing about their history. Right now they only care about the lives of Jews, and of course that is important, but there are many other people dying right now and suffering a lot.

“The terrible genocide in the 20th century cannot be a justification for carrying out a genocide in the 21st century,” Pedro said, adding: “Europe is not following its own values. I was educated and told that Europe was about values, but it is not about values right now. The

things that are taking place today are fascistic. Everything is about geopolitics, about power and not at all about human rights.”

He stressed his solidarity with the protests taking place across Europe and the world against the genocide in Gaza. “This is the most dignified thing people can do against governments that behave in fascistic ways. I believe in international solidarity against fascistic governments, against ruling classes that are seeking only their own interests. These governments do not do what is right, they do not follow the values that they say we should follow, they are supporting the aggressor. I am very disappointed and very worried that we cannot even protest.”

Pedro stressed his disappointment with the Spanish coalition government between the Socialist Party (PSOE) and the pseudo-left Podemos party, adding: “I would like it if they were more progressive, but clearly they are not. I am very disappointed with this government, with their policy on the Western Sahara. ... They are not what the workers of the world need, I am very disappointed in them.”

This weekend’s protests throughout Europe, the Middle East, India and North America show that popular opposition to the NATO-backed Israeli onslaught is growing. This movement must seek to win support in and mobilize the working class and take up a conscious struggle against the capitalist political establishment to force an end to the escalation of war across the Middle East.



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