

2024 Paris Olympics open amid massive police-state clampdown

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Yesterday's opening ceremony launched the 2024 Paris Olympics, in which 11,310 athletes from 206 countries will compete in 48 different sports. After these games end on August 11, 4,400 athletes will compete in the August 28-September 8 Paralympic Games. Three billion people internationally will watch the Games and the feats athletes from around the world will accomplish there.

The essentially international and humane character of the athletic events is however more than ever in sharp conflict with the capitalist nation-state system. Indeed, French authorities are terrified that protests in France could trigger an explosive response among billions of people watching the games, amid mass global opposition to the policies of the French government and its NATO imperialist allies.

French President Emmanuel Macron has provocatively invited Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to attend the games amid the Israeli genocide in Gaza. The games began less than three weeks after his government collapsed in snap legislative elections, as an overwhelming majority of the French people rejects Macron's call to send troops to Ukraine to fight Russia and his financing of military spending with pension cuts. The same deep-rooted opposition to genocide, war and austerity exists, moreover, among workers and youth internationally.

The Paris Olympics, domestic intelligence agencies warned in a memo reported by BFM-TV, risk "showcasing various acts committed in the context of social opposition."

French intelligence agencies particularly feared "the large increase in the population" of the Paris area as millions arrive for the games. This could strain their ability to repress strikes and protests. Events like last summer's mass urban riots after the police murder of the young Nahel, they warned, "could occur again after some particular event, and impact the response capabilities of

interior security forces already mobilized on security for the 2024 Olympic Games."

This underscores the fraudulence of French media and politicians' claims that police operations during the Olympics are above all anti-terrorist operations. Fearing an explosion of social and political opposition, the ruling class is carrying out a police clamp-down aimed at the French and world population—and, above all, at the working class.

In Nantes, yesterday, the police prefect banned all demonstrations during the Olympics, claiming they posed an unacceptable "threat to public order." In the nearby city of Châteauroux, the prefect banned a protest against inviting Israeli athletes to the Olympics. He claimed this posed "a serious threat to public order," as references to the Gaza genocide promote a "very politicized orientation often taken up by ultra-left organizations."

In Paris itself, Macron has mobilized an army of 45,000 riot and military police, 10,000 soldiers and 22,000 private security guards. Drones patrol the skies, while low-flying helicopters thunder over the neighborhoods closest to the Olympic venues. Dozens of countries have sent police or troops to help patrol Paris; anyone crossing the city meets French, Spanish, German, Qatari or other cops with body armor and assault rifles every few blocks.

Much of Paris is off limits unless one has a QR code delivered by the police prefecture, though even these are often not enough: police equipment malfunctions and cannot read the QR codes if there is too much sunlight.

Many people are avoiding the three concentric security perimeters police have established around the Olympic venues, or avoiding Paris altogether. As a result, Union of Hospitality Industries (UMIH) President Thierry Marx reported, Paris restaurants are losing 30 to 60 percent of their revenue. Virtually all restaurants and shops have closed on the city's two central islands, and truck deliveries to businesses in Paris face massive delays.

It is only this explosive political context that explains the official reaction yesterday to reports of fires targeting France's high-speed train (TGV) network.

Reports of four coordinated arson attacks targeting cables for TGV signaling systems dominated French media yesterday morning. These fires broke out around 5 a.m. at three widely-separated locations at Courtalain, Pagny-sur-Moselle and Croisilles, threatening TGV traffic from Paris to the north, east and west. French officials suspended traffic on most of the TGV network, announcing that 250,000 people yesterday, and 800,000 people by the end of the weekend would be stranded, left unable to go to the Olympics.

By mid-morning, before any clear reports on the scope of the fires or the identity of any arsonists emerged, French officials were treating them as an act of war. It is "France that is being attacked," declared French National Railways (SNCF) CEO Jean-Pierre Farandou, while Paris area regional president Valérie Pécresse called it "an attempt to destabilize France." The Paris prosecutors' office said that it was investigating the fires as an "attack on the fundamental interests of the nation."

Shortly before 11 a.m., police admitted they had no leads on the identity of potential arsonists, but demanded that the fires nevertheless be treated as left-wing terrorism. The right-wing daily *Le Figaro* cited "police sources" as saying: "While this attack cannot be clearly attributed to wrongdoers, the most likely suspects at this point are the ultra-left."

Police officials insisted through multiple media channels that, at least until any evidence emerged, the left should be held responsible for an attack on France. These attacks, one police official told *Le Figaro*, "evoked a modus operandi used in the past by members of the ultra-left."

In reality, this assertion raises far more questions than it answers. The main alleged "ultra-left" attack on the TGV is the infamous 2008 Tarnac affair, when a small anarchist group was charged with plotting to destroy TGV rail lines. The allegations ultimately fell apart, however, and all the accused were cleared, after it emerged the individual in the group advocating attacks on the TGV was a British "Spy Cops" police provocateur, Mark Kennedy.

What occurred in these fires remains unclear as of this writing—including how a small, "ultra-left" organization could have prepared a coordinated, nationwide attack on the SNCF undetected amid the massive mobilization of police and intelligence agencies during the Olympics.

However, if past "modus operandi" of planned attacks on the TGV were to be taken as a guide, they would indicate that the fires were a state provocation.

By the afternoon, top officials and media internationally were making totally unsubstantiated accusations that major world powers targeted by NATO for war had set the fires. As the Israeli regime campaigns for war with Iran, Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz asserted, without providing any evidence, that the TGV signaling fires were "planned any executed under the influence of Iran's axis of evil."

The British *Guardian* pointed the finger at Russia, writing: "Security services across Europe have long been on alert to Russian sabotage after alleged Russian involvement in an arson attack in east London." It cited former French ambassador to Russia Jean Gliniasty, who said, "We are obviously in a situation of conflict with Russia, and Russia is obviously not going to do anything, and that is an understatement, to help these Olympic Games be a success."

Last night, acting French Prime Minister Gabriel Attal felt compelled to ask the media to be "prudent" in their remarks about the TGV fires.

Whatever emerges about the fires, one thing is certain. Macron's hopes for the Olympics—that, as *Le Monde* wrote, they will "open a lull where the sense of national pride will overcome political divisions"—will be disappointed. The French ruling class is building a fascistic police state because of the deep-rooted conflict between the working class and imperialism that is set to explode sooner rather than later.



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