

Macron threatens a state of emergency against mass mobilization in France

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Yesterday, during a visit to Marseille, Emmanuel Macron raised the threat of imposing a state of emergency against the mass mobilization of youth and workers against his government.

At his press conference in Marseille, Macron referred to the mobilizations of October 17 and 24 and insisted that he could resort to a state of emergency if the movement continued to grow: “We are upholding the Republic and public order without a state of emergency. That does not mean that if things were to deteriorate, it is forbidden or taboo.”

The threat highlights the political tasks confronting the working class today. It confirms that the state apparatus and the ruling class are responding to this historic mobilization by planning a far-right dictatorship.

The youth mobilized over education, the “yellow vests” mobilized over energy prices and purchasing power, and their demands against austerity, neo-fascism, billionaires and war reflect the views of tens of millions of people in France. As the protests spread to Spain, Italy, Belgium, Serbia, Albania, Greece and beyond, their struggle reflects the sentiments of hundreds of millions of Europeans. Youth and workers in struggle must defend democratic rights against the capitalist state.

The state of emergency, imposed by the Socialist Party (PS) under François Hollande after the 2015 Islamist terror attacks in Paris, suspends fundamental democratic rights. It allows the state to carry out searches and seizures without a warrant, ban demonstrations and public meetings, detain individuals or place them under house arrest, dissolve the associations in which they take part, censor the press, and set up military tribunals.

Its provisions on curfews and protest bans were written into ordinary law by the PS and Macron when they ended the state of emergency on paper in 2017. They are already being used to repress the ongoing protests.

With neo-fascist Marine Le Pen leading in every poll

for the presidential election, the political content of a renewed resort to the state of emergency is clear. In 1940, it was the French parliament that voted full powers to Pétain, the dissolution of the Republic and the establishment of a collaborationist regime. In 2026, broad sections of the bourgeoisie are trying to bring the far right to power, and the outgoing president is considering handing dictatorial powers to a possible incoming National Rally (RN) government.

While the RN is not in power and Le Pen remains unpopular among the French people, with only 34 percent favorable opinions, the ruling class is already trying to pass a broad array of dictatorial measures taken from the RN’s program.

On July 7, the National Assembly adopted at first reading a bill to establish a “presumption of self-defense” whenever a police officer uses his weapon. Following the protests and riots in 2023 over the cold-blooded police killing of Nahel, the bill creates a “presumption of legitimate use of weapons.” The Assembly shelved the petition against the bill, which had gathered more than 720,000 signatures to avoid a public debate. Amnesty International denounced the bill as a “license to kill.”

While this bill now awaits debate in the right-wing-dominated Senate this autumn, the government is also pushing forward a “rioter pays” bill filed in the Senate. It would allow the state to force anyone present at the scene of a protest where property was damaged to pay up to €10,000. The state could collect this sum by directly seizing the family allowances, housing assistance and other social benefits of those convicted.

The bill also allows the suspension of convicted persons’ social media accounts, the use of drones to identify suspects, and the expulsion of foreigners present at the scene of a demonstration. It raises the penalty for the offense of participating in a group with a view to committing violence from one year in prison and a

€15,000 fine to three years and €45,000. This bill imposes enormous financial risks on anyone who protests and poses a serious threat to the right to demonstrate.

At the same time, Macron again called for strengthening police operations targeting protesters. He admitted that “order was maintained” during the October 24 mobilizations.

But according to him, “in Marseille as elsewhere,” on October 17, “there were not enough security forces ... We had not anticipated at all what happened.” He declared: “What had not been anticipated was that we would have so many ultra-left forces mobilizing very early in the morning, in a very atypical way. We had not anticipated that, beyond this ultra-left mobilization, we would also have delinquency coming on top of it. The police forces were not duly proportioned.”

These claims will only intensify the questions workers and youth are asking about the role of the security forces on October 17. What accounts for the glaring difference between the violence targeting shops on October 17 and the far calmer situation on the 24th?

There have been about 3,700 arrests in France linked to the protests since October 17, according to figures from the Interior Ministry. This number is enormous. However, it cannot explain the absence of property destruction on October 24. If the police had in this way arrested everyone who wanted to protest in order to smash things up, this would mean that a few thousand people had overwhelmed the vast security deployment of tens of thousands of police on October 17.

In its vast majority, the movement of youth and workers, in France as across Europe, is focused on its demands and peaceful. The attempt to ban protests and brand protesters as rioters comes from a government at bay, whose policies of war and dictatorship are rejected by workers. It is under these conditions that many workers are asking whether the security forces made use of the rioters on October 17.

Deep opposition to the existing social and political order is mobilizing millions of people across Europe. The bourgeoisie will not be able to stifle this upsurge of the class struggle simply through repression and anti-democratic laws. But crucial political lessons must also be drawn from the experience of the previous state of emergency in France.

The working class and youth cannot leave the task of defending democracy against the capitalist oligarchy and neo-fascism to the parliamentary parties or the union bureaucracies. These organizations are oriented above all

to negotiations within the capitalist state apparatus. They do not oppose a dictatorial project on a principled, class basis.

As the Assembly vote on the license to kill for the security forces shows, a majority there has been won over to the RN's positions on police repression. Moreover, the minority of France Unbowed (LFI) deputies in the Assembly is no solid political defense of democratic rights against the police state and the RN. Indeed, in November 2015, Mélenchon's parliamentary group voted for the state of emergency sought by the PS.

The defense of democratic rights requires the broadest possible mobilization of the working class in struggle. Already, the question of a return to May 1968, when police repression of students provoked the largest general strike in French history, is being widely raised among workers and youth. The task now is to organize and mobilize the working class to prepare a new general strike, on a French but above all a European scale.

To do so, workers and youth must organize themselves in action committees, independent of the union apparatuses, in order to overcome the unions' passivity and to discuss more broadly within the working class the political tasks arising from this situation.

Above all, it must be understood that the defense of democratic rights will require a struggle by the working class to take power from the capitalist oligarchy. The defense of democracy runs through the struggle for workers' power and the replacement of the European Union by the United Socialist States of Europe.



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