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French Prime Minister proposes government registry of demonstrators

Following the large turnout throughout France for the eighth week of “yellow vest” (*Gilets jaunes*) protests this past Saturday, French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe announced on French television Monday night the imposition of an extraordinary law to suppress the demonstrations. Taking up measures initially put forward by the neo-fascists, he proposed that demonstrators be placed on government subversive lists and subjected to financial sanctions.

Philippe admitted that the “yellow vest” protests express social anger shared by workers throughout France, and indeed across Europe. “From the beginning, in the statements of the ‘yellow vests’, there were demands for more purchasing power, speaking for French people who felt forgotten and ignored,” he declared.

But despite this admission, Philippe stressed that his government would not change its widely hated policy, but rather would seek to suppress the movement by putting in place additional obstacles to the right to demonstrate and strengthening the vast police apparatus for use against the population.

He announced that protesters would be registered on a list in order to ban them from demonstrating, using a method similar to the “hooligan card,” which permits police to prevent certain individuals from entering football stadiums. In addition, he would impose penalties against demonstrations that have not been registered with the prefecture. “The government is in favor of changing our law and punishing those who do not respect this reporting [registration] obligation,” he declared.

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Philippe also proposed measures to allow the police to impose heavy sentences on protesters. “For those who come in hoods (*cagoulé*), today it is a misdeed; tomorrow it must be a crime. It must be the thugs who pay and not the taxpayers,” he said. He added: “We cannot accept that some people take advantage of these demonstrations to riot, to break and burn things. These people will never have the last word in our country.”

The prime minister announced a mass mobilization of the police, comparable to that in early December 2018, which closed off the center of Paris. He stated: “Specialized equipment used by the police, such as armored vehicles and water cannons, proved effective. We must therefore seriously consider using these again and increasing their operational capabilities.” He pledged to mobilize 85,000 police, CRS police reserves, paramilitary gendarmes and other forces next weekend, especially in Paris.

This makes clear the antidemocratic orientation of President Macron and the European Union, which backs him. In the face of workers’ support for the “yellow vests” and the widespread rejection of European-wide austerity policies, Macron wants to impose the diktat of the banks by force. The attempts by Philippe and Macron to pose as defenders of democracy in order to justify the construction of a police state that tramples on workers’ opposition to austerity and war are nothing but hypocritical lies.

The press has poured out a torrent of slander against the “yellow vests,” labelling them as fascists. It is Macron, however, who is carrying out a far-right policy. Philippe’s proposals repeat the demands that Alliance, the police union close to the neo-fascists, called for following Saturday’s demonstration. These measures would seek to stifle social anger by threatening protesters with preventive arrest and exorbitant fines.

On Sunday, the secretary general of Alliance, Frédéric Lagache, proposed that protesters be registered “on the model of stadium bans” (the “Hooligan card”). He called for the wearing of a hood in demonstrations to be punished as a crime, and for “harsher penalties” to be imposed on demonstrators.

While proposing a significant increase in repressive measures, the alternate police union CFDT opposed some of the proposals put forward by the neo-fascist Alliance. It criticized the proposal to register demonstrators as “useless and counterproductive.” The CFDT statement declared: “An administrative file alone will be useless, except to identify individuals who might be dangerous during demonstrations, but would lack any coercive power before an action is carried out.”

Indeed, the creation of a registry only opens the door to preventive arrests of a fundamentally illegal character of people who have displeased the police for one or another reason, prior to a demonstration in which they could not even participate.

Despite the very close links between the CFDT and the government, Philippe and Macron have taken up the proposals of the neo-fascist Alliance union.

This proves the correctness of the analysis made by the *Parti de l'égalité socialiste* (PES) when Macron was elected president in 2017. The PES stated that the decisive question was to prepare a workers' movement against both candidates—Macron and the neo-fascist Marine Le Pen—because Macron was not a more democratic alternative.

The central question raised by the radicalization of workers in the “yellow vest” movement is the need to mobilize workers as widely as possible against attempts to establish police states throughout Europe.

Macron's declaration last November that it is legitimate to honor the military career of Marshal Philippe Pétain, the fascist dictator who collaborated with the Nazi occupation, made clear that he is seeking to erect an authoritarian regime, in the guise of the “defense of the Republic.”

Increasingly reactionary and provocative police measures are multiplying across France since the eruption of the “yellow vest” movement.

At the beginning of this year, the Somme police department in northern France adopted a decree forbidding the use or transport of respiratory protection equipment. This measure—which immediately illegalized work by firefighters, doctors, nurses and law enforcement itself—was intended to permit police to stop and question protesters with gas masks and to confiscate their protective equipment.

Christophe Dettinger, the former boxer who struck gendarmes during a police charge against the “yellow vests” on Saturday, went to the police yesterday accompanied by his lawyer. He had been the subject of a hysterical campaign in the media and of a manhunt by police, who raided his home.

In a video posted online before his surrender, Dettinger explained his actions: “I wanted to advance towards the CRS when I was gassed... At a certain point, my anger mounted, and yes, I reacted badly. Yes, I reacted badly, but I defended myself, and that's all... French people, “yellow vests,” I am wholeheartedly with you. We must continue peacefully, but please continue the fight. “

Now the state is threatening him with five years in prison and a €75,000 fine, aimed at making it illegal for demonstrators to defend themselves against police brutality.

Dettinger's former coach, Jacky Trompesauce, commented: "Christophe is a top athlete. He is a respectful man, he is not a thug.... He could not stand to see the gendarmes go after those who are weaker than them. I think I see pictures of women being teargassed, perhaps his own wife. He has three children. He is not wearing a hood, he has only his bare hands. He is not a brawler."