

French police mobilize against protests by youth in Aulnay

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This weekend, France's Socialist Party (PS) government deployed large numbers of police under the state of emergency against Paris area youth protesting the sexual assault by police of Théo, a young man seriously wounded in the rectum by police at Aulnay-sous-Bois. Several protests erupted into clashes with the security forces.

Théo was assaulted 10 days ago and seriously wounded, requiring immediate surgery and a 60-day release from work, after police penetrated him with a billy club. He was also wounded on the head and face. Once police officers took him inside their vehicle, they beat and insulted him, calling him a "dirty bitch."

On Saturday, February 11, a protest organized before the courthouse at Bobigny in the Seine-Saint Denis district brought together NGO officials and private citizens who spoke at an open mic on an improvised stage and delivered remarks denouncing police violence. The crowd chanted slogans including "Rapists in jail," "Everyone hates the police," "Justice for Théo," and "No justice, no peace."

After calls were launched on social media, a crowd gathered in Argenteuil the next day to protest not only the sexual assault against Théo, but also the death of Adama Traoré from police brutality last summer, as well as the suburban riots of 2005.

The PS reacted by mobilizing a large-scale police deployment. Numerous security forces intervened, particularly in Bobigny, on a walkway overlooking the site of the demonstration. The two protests in Bobigny and Argenteuil ended in clashes with police. Cars and trashcans were burned, while security forces fired teargas at the protesters.

There were several dozen arrests: 37 were arrested in Bobigny; 11 in Argenteuil, including eight minors; and on the night of Sunday to Monday, still in Seine Saint-

Denis, 10 people were detained. Arrests also took place in other working class suburbs, including Drancy, Noisy-le-Sec and Bondy. Moreover, in addition to those arrested this weekend, five others were arrested after protests against the assault against Théo last weekend.

The media and the political establishment are trying to cover up the sexual assault of Théo, and more broadly the issue of police brutality, by invoking the presumption of innocence in favour of the police. However, growing popular outrage in the face of police violence underscores explosive social tensions that are rising.

Over a period of several decades, inhabitants of working class and immigrant suburbs have routinely faced insults, arbitrary arrests and acts of violence by the police. At the same time, discriminatory measures are mounting against Muslims, from the 2003 ban on veils in public schools to the ban on the burqa in 2009, which the PS continued under President François Hollande. This provoked large-scale rioting in 2005 and 2007 in suburbs of Paris and across France over several days. Nonetheless, police involved in cases that provoked these riots were let off scot-free.

Last summer, at Beaumont-sur-Oise, Adama Traoré died under suspicious circumstances while in police custody. Police denied his family the right to see his body, and claimed that he had suffered a heart attack—an explanation that his family has always rejected.

His brother, Bagui Traoré, explained: "They took him to the gendarmerie in Persan. I found him there, surrounded by five or six gendarmes [paramilitary police]. He was on the ground, his hands were cuffed behind his back. He was no longer breathing, he was lifeless. There was blood on his face. I saw a gendarme

who was one of those who had stopped us. He was wearing a white T-shirt and I saw him come back with a T-shirt covered with blood, my brother's blood. My partner was there, she saw it also. Adama did not have a heart attack; they beat him."

The PS government is deeply unpopular and, facing rising anger in working class areas, fears the eruption of riots as in 2005 and 2007. Moreover, unlike 10 years ago, protests are unfolding in the context of the state of emergency imposed by the PS after the November 13, 2015 terror attacks in Paris, committed by Islamist networks mobilized by the NATO powers in the context of their war for regime change in Syria.

The political establishment is demanding the banning of protests and more brutal repression of the protesters. From Réunion island, where he was campaigning, conservative presidential candidate François Fillon issued a statement denouncing "the role of the government" who "took the risk of authorizing the protest in Bobigny. ... Will there have to be people wounded for Mr. Bruno Le Roux to make a statement? Why did the interior minister authorize this demonstration, when the risks of violence were so obvious?"

The barbaric violence committed against Théo underscores the profoundly reactionary character of the state of emergency, whose main target is not the terrorists, but youth and the working class inside France itself.

The PS' imposition of the state of emergency has gone hand in hand with the promotion by the media and the political establishment of the police, as well as the legitimization of the neo-fascist National Front (FN). The PS' arrests and deportations of immigrants, its state of emergency, its setting up of a national guard, and its attempt to inscribe the principle of deprivation of nationality in the constitution were all taken from the FN's program. This has produced a situation in which police feel empowered to commit atrocities against suburban working class youth.

As a Cevipof study found in October 2016, 56 percent of military officers and police are considering voting for the FN in the 2017 presidential elections.

This reflects the growing alignment of the outlook of large sections of the security forces with the FN's inciting of anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant racism. The *20 minutes* newspaper cites political analyst Luc

Rouban: "I don't believe in conspiracy theories. There is not a secret takeover of the police by the FN, but a convergence of the FN's appeals, in the direction of poorer people and public servants, with the expectations of the police services."



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