

The 2024 police-state Olympics in Paris

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A vast gap has always separated the stated goals of the Olympic games from reality. Their proclamation of “excellence, respect and friendship” with “a view to building a better world” inevitably clashes with the glorification of money in athletics and the capitalist establishment’s promotion of a nationalist fixation on athletes of one’s own country.

In the 2024 Paris Olympics, however, this contradiction between the feats of Olympic athletes and the broader reality of society reaches an unprecedented intensity. These games unfold in the shadow of war, genocide and the breakdown of capitalist society. An army of nearly 80,000 cops, soldiers and private security guards has virtually placed Paris under lockdown, as the ruling class launches a mind-numbing barrage of nationalist propaganda amid the NATO war with Russia and the Israeli genocide in Gaza.

Before the games, French President Emmanuel Macron declared he would be happy to invite Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is wanted on charges of genocide by the International Criminal Court, to the Paris Olympics. Ultimately, it was Israeli President Isaac Herzog, currently under investigation for his calls for mass murder, who met Macron at the Elysée Palace before attending the opening ceremony.

Herzog is infamous for demanding the collective punishment of the Palestinian people that has now claimed over 186,000 lives. “It is an entire nation that is responsible. It is not true, this rhetoric about civilians not being aware, not involved. It’s absolutely not true,” he declared. He justified attacks on Palestinian civilians’ homes, hospitals, refugee camps, essential infrastructure and food distributions that have killed perhaps hundreds of thousands, stating: “Unfortunately, in their homes, there are missiles shooting at us...”

Macron’s embrace of Herzog also exposes the hypocrisy of the banning of Russian and Belarusian athletes from the opening ceremony. This is

propaganda aimed at the opposition of the vast majority of the population, in the United States, Western Europe and internationally, to calls by Macron and his NATO allies to send ground troops to Ukraine to fight Russia.

The calculations underlying the barrage of nationalist propaganda and police-state measures were crassly laid out by Macron administration officials in an off-the-record interview in *Le Monde*. “Macron hopes to see our country fall in love with its athletes and to profit then from popular enthusiasm,” it reported. It hoped the opening ceremony would “begin a lull where national pride will overtake political quarrels,” heal “a fractured nation” and raise the prestige of “a leader who allowed this ceremony to take place outside a stadium.”

The Olympics will not resolve the contradictions of a society irreconcilably split along class lines. Macron is despised for ruling against the people because he epitomizes policies of war and austerity rejected by workers around the world. Polls show 90 percent of the French population opposes Macron’s calls for war with Russia and the pension cuts he imposed without a vote last year, amid mass strikes, in order to fund plans for military escalation in Ukraine.

Macron has publicly proclaimed his hope that the Olympics will prove to be a “political truce” after his party lost the July 7 elections amid a surge of left-wing and anti-fascist sentiment. But in reality, there is no pause in the efforts of the Macron administration and the entire French ruling class to build a fascistic police state aimed above all against the workers. As he holds back-channel talks with the far-right National Rally on a future government, Macron is unabashedly basing his rule directly on the police forces, which largely vote neo-fascist.

France’s police and intelligence agencies have carried out a massive 1 million background checks on Olympic athletes, volunteers and workers, as well as on visitors. These checks, based on 20 million police

records—nearly a third of France’s population—blocked 5,000 people from attending. Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin, who has repeatedly made vague accusations that Russia aims to destabilize France during the Olympics, claimed these background checks found 1,000 spies.

Police are banning protests against the Gaza genocide, while drones, low-flying helicopters and military police detachments establish multiple security zones in the territory and the skies of Paris. To prepare for the Olympics, police have displaced 12,000 people in Paris, often homeless. As military, national and regional police forces are integrated, even subway security guards now routinely intervene in crowded subways to arrest and handcuff suspects.

The police build-up goes hand in hand with relentless media denunciations of left-wing politics. After several fires targeted train and Internet infrastructure amid the games, police announced that they follow the “modus operandi of the extreme left.” While Darmanin has called for commentators to be “prudent” in ascribing responsibility to the 45 members of the Extinction Rebellion ecological group now arrested by police, the campaign denouncing the “ultra-left” as responsible for terrorism continues unabated.

In reality, the Olympics are exposing how not a single significant social problem can be addressed, let alone resolved, under conditions where mass opposition to the existing capitalist order is suppressed by police states and their political accomplices.

Amid a summer surge of COVID-19 in France, which is systematically blacked out by the press and establishment parties, including the New Popular Front (NFP), the Olympics are emerging as a superspreader event. Australian water polo players, British swimmers and Belgian athletes have all fallen ill with COVID-19, but no overall protocol has been established to halt the spread of the virus. France’s corrupt union bureaucracies have isolated groups of Olympic volunteers, who have threatened to resign, declaring that the “COVID-19 pandemic threat denial is not an antidote to contamination.”

Perhaps the most degraded of all is Macron’s attempt, in the name of his innovative plan to hold Olympic events in and around the Seine River, to force swimmers to compete in water contaminated with raw sewage.

French companies and major investors have received hundreds of billions of euros in bank bailouts since the COVID-19 pandemic, which have made French billionaire Bernard Arnault a contender for the position of the world’s richest man. But the reality is that one of the world’s wealthiest countries has many open sewage lines, and large rainfall massively contaminates the Seine with E. coli and other bacteria. These now threaten to block the triathlon event, or, if it proceeds, to produce devastating infections among many athletes.

Renowned German triathlete Jan Frodeno has issued a public warning recalling how the career of his wife, Emma Snowsill, was ended in 2014 after a swimming event in contaminated water left her with lasting health problems.

The relentless normalization of ever-greater outrages by the capitalist class faces deep, historically rooted opposition in the international working class. Indeed, before the games, French intelligence prepared a memo worrying about uncontrollable mass riots possibly erupting during the Olympics and “showcasing various acts committed in the context of social opposition” to a global television audience of 3 billion people.

Only the mobilization and unification of this powerful force, the international working class, can overcome the nationalism and police-state reaction produced by the mortal crisis of the capitalist nation-state system. The decisive question today is building a mass movement against imperialist war, genocide and capitalism, in full independence from openly fascist or nominally “democratic” capitalist parties, in a struggle for workers’ power and for socialism.



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