

French Police Arrest “Yellow Vest” Spokesman Eric Drouet

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*Wednesday night, as he went to Paris’s Concord Square to light candles to commemorate “yellow vest” protesters who have died during the movement, police arrested **Eric Drouet**. The pretext for this arrest, which tramples underfoot the constitutionally protected right to protest, was that this gathering had not been declared previously at the police prefecture. Drouet had called for a gathering on Concord Square in a Facebook video.*

Surrounded by sympathizers, Drouet was first trapped and then grabbed by the police and finally carted off amid cries of “Shame!”, “Dictatorship!” and “Bastards!” from the crowd. He was placed in preventive detention, while other protesters were arrested for identity checks.

Drouet’s lawyer **Khéops Lara** denounced “a completely unjustified and arbitrary arrest,” which leaves Drouet facing up to six months in jail and a €7,500 fine. Lara explained:

“His ‘crime’ was to place candles (...) on Concord Square in Paris to commemorate the fallen ‘yellow vests’ who died from various causes during protests and blockades of highway intersections. Then he wanted to come together with a few friends and loved ones in a private area, a restaurant, to discuss and share viewpoints.”

The Paris prosecutor’s office alleges that Drouet organized “a demonstration without prior notification.” **Junior Minister Olivier Dussopt** told BFMTV:

“When you don’t play by the rules, it’s normal to pay the price.”

These accusations are absurd and point to the malignant growth of the police state in France. Drouet was not organizing a mass demonstration, which are often declared in police prefectures, but a meeting of a few individuals—which the state now is asserting it can ban.

Lara demanded an end to Drouet’s preventive detention, which the prosecutor’s office refused, and added:

“With the propaganda campaign against Eric Drouet vomited up by the police, the media and the politicians, the men and women of France’s lower classes are being insulted.”

The ruling class is indeed launching a signal: it intends to persecute all acts of genuine

political opposition, even those protected by law, with its police machine. Faced with rising social anger among workers in France and internationally, who also oppose the union bureaucracies that have traditionally controlled and strangled working-class protests and strikes, the ruling class is reacting with repression. Beyond hordes of riot police and armored vehicles, it is using the pseudo-judicial lynching of prominent opposition figures.

Drouet has served as a spokesman for sections of the “yellow vest” movement opposed to French **President Emmanuel Macron**’s attempts to strangle the movement with sterile offers of talks. With **Priscilla Ludosky**, Drouet met **Ecology Minister François de Rugy** on November 28 to represent the “yellow vests” in talks with the government. Drouet brought down on him the hatred of the government and the media by turning down de Rugy’s offer, saying it did not satisfy the demands of the “yellow vests.”

Since then, Drouet has been the target of escalating police repression that is aimed ultimately at crushing and sidelining all members of the movement who emerge as obstacles to the state’s attempts to break up and demoralize the protests with offers of fruitless talks.

Drouet’s latest arrest provoked broad anger among the “yellow vests.” Already they have organized crowd-funding campaigns to finance Drouet’s legal expenses in the various cases concocted against him by the security forces.

In early December, as the growing movement faced ferocious repression of the Saturday protests, Drouet was placed in preventive detention and his home was targeted for a police search. He was accused of “provocation of the commission of a crime or misdemeanor” and “organizing an illicit protest.” The sole basis for these charges was that he had declared, during an interview with journalists on BFMTV, that he would like to go into the Elysée presidential palace.

On December 8, Drouet was arrested during the fourth weekend of protests in Paris, supposedly for “bearing a banned weapon of category D,” that is, a piece of wood, according to press reports, and for “participation in a grouping formed to commit violence or damages.” Drouet is to be tried for these charges on June 5.

This relentless targeting of Drouet underscores yet again that Macron and the European Union have no intention of responding to the demands of the “yellow vests” or of workers in struggle across Europe. The Macron government, isolated and hated by masses of workers, is terrified by the “yellow vest” movement. Yet in response, it is proposing only to step up the policies of austerity and militarism that intensify social inequality and provoked the opposition of the “yellow vests.”

In his New Year’s wishes on December 31, Macron insisted he would continue his social cuts targeting pensions, unemployment insurance and public sector wage levels. He also denounced the criticisms of his presidency formulated by the “yellow vests,” lecturing the French people: “Dignity, my dear fellow citizens, is also respecting everyone. And I must say, I have seen unimaginable things in recent times and heard the unacceptable.”

This is the dictatorial language of a banker-president who claimed at the time of his election that France lacks a king, and who now seems to want to apply for that position, despite the opposition of an overwhelming majority of the French population to his policies.

The task of defeating the persecution of Drouet falls to the working class. More than 70 percent of French people support the “yellow vests,” who have evoked broad sympathy from workers around the world. But the established political parties and the union bureaucracies, totally integrated into the state and already furious that the “yellow vests” have outflanked them, are violently hostile. They aim to nip in the bud the struggles in the working class that break out against Macron.

The way forward is to take the struggle out of their hands, mobilizing ever-larger sections of workers independently of, and against, the union bureaucracies in France and across Europe, in defense of democratic and social rights.

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