



Written by [James Murphy](#) on May 2, 2019

Traditional May Day Protests in France Become Violent Riots

May 1 is a traditional day off for French union workers, similar to Labor Day in America. This year in Paris, in the midst of the Yellow Vest movement, the traditionally peaceful May Day rallies turned into violent riots, yet again plunging the protest-weary city into chaos as rioters clashed with police.

Members of the anti-capitalist extremist group Black Bloc, which was responsible for much of the violence, referred to the protests as “Armageddon,” though, thankfully, the violence didn’t quite reach end-of-the-world proportions.



The rioting occurred a week after French President [Emmanuel Macron](#) announced tax cuts and a series of government reforms intended to address concerns of the Yellow Vest protestors.

But prominent Yellow Vest protestor Maximme Nicolle, among others, doesn’t believe Macron’s reforms go far enough. “He has not listened to what we’ve been saying in the streets the last five months,” Nicolle said.

Nicolle lamented the police involvement in Wednesday’s protests, while vowing the movement would continue on in spite of it. “They want to prevent us from protesting, they want to divide the cortege in two,” Nicolle said. “The [Yellow Vest] movement will continue to go on this Saturday, and the Saturday after that.”

Close to 40 people were wounded in clashes with the more than 7,000 police officers deployed to keep order. Fourteen officers were injured, including a captain who was hit with a paving stone. At least 380 arrests were made as the black-clad, masked protestors threw rocks, smashed windows, and set buildings and trash bins on fire.

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Police used riot gear, water cannons, and tear gas in an attempt to break up the black-clad protestors interspersed among the crowd of union employees who had gathered for their traditional May Day march.

A group of approximately 30 rioters attempted to storm the intensive care unit of the Pitie-Salpetriere Hospital where Princess Diana died in 1997. The protestors may have been attempting to get to police who were being treated at the facility.

“We do not know if the thugs were trying to get the captain [who was hit with the paving stone] or other officers, but they were clearly very angry. Security guards signaled that they were trying to force themselves through a locked gate that eventually gave way,” a hospital spokesman said. “It was then that the mob got into the hospital grounds, and made its way up a staircase to the first floor intensive care unit. Staff had to secure a door of a unit full of patients who require intensive care.”



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Hospital staff reported that the group who attacked the hospital were wearing the high-visibility yellow vests that have become a symbol of the protest movement in France.

A female journalist working for the Russian news agency Ria Novosti claimed she was hit by police during the rioting. “The helmet saved me from serious injuries, but my arm was still in pain,” said Viktoria Ivanova. Ivanova was reportedly wearing “press” arm bands when she was hit.

On Tuesday, French police had warned that there might be clashes with far-left anarchists after calls for violence were captured on social media. Authorities had expected some 2,000 Black Bloc protestors to show up on the sidelines of the traditional May Day events. French Interior Minister Christophe Castaner had warned that “radical activists” were looking to infiltrate the planned rallies.

Mostly peaceful events occurred in cities all over France, although approximately 300 Yellow Vest protestors attempted to storm a police station in the Alpine town of Besancon. Clashes with police were also reported in Toulouse. In Paris, around 40,000 showed up for the protests, although the Interior Ministry estimated that only 16,000 were involved.

French police preemptively [banned protests in certain areas](#) including the Champs-Élysées, the presidential palace, the National Assembly and the Notre Dame cathedral. [Police also ordered several businesses closed](#) during the events including banks — a frequent target of rioters since the Yellow Vest movement began last November.

Back in November when the Yellow Vest movement began in response to onerous carbon taxes imposed by the government to combat so-called global warming, people worldwide could be somewhat sympathetic to the movement, as long as it was relatively peaceful. But those days appear to be long gone, now that the movement has aligned itself with anti-capitalist extremist groups like the Black Bloc.

Attacking a hospital and storming a police station are no way to get your point across. Tactics like these make the Yellow Vests look the “bad guys,” no matter what their complaints are. Or maybe that was the intent of the radical Black Bloc rioters, in order to provoke a strong government response that will merely lead to more chaos.

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