

“Macron is the president of the rich”: “Yellow Vest” protesters speak out

Our reporters

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On Monday, the powerful protests in France against inequality and government austerity continued in numerous regions across the country. Tens of thousands of participants in the “Yellow Vest” demonstrations maintained roadblocks and barricades. Traffic was heavily affected in the major cities. Bordeaux was practically brought to a standstill throughout the morning, and numerous important highways were blocked off.

Dozens of fuel depots were affected by the actions, including in Toulouse and Rennes. On Réunion Island, barricades remained in place yesterday, with tense standoffs between demonstrators and police and calls by the local police prefecture for reinforcements from Paris. Many of the protesters have declared they intend to “continue until the government gives in.”

Employer associations warned yesterday against a “shutdown of the economy.” However, as the transportation companies call for workers to stay away from the demonstrations, large numbers of drivers are supporting or joining it. A roadblock has already been called for Saturday in Paris.

Last night, the Minister of the Interior, Christophe Castaner, announced his plan to break the roadblocks, invoking “major security risks, particularly of terrorism,” to which the “massively mobilized” police forces would be unable to respond.

The protest movement, which includes workers, independent truck drivers and small businesspeople, was initiated via social media outside the control of the trade unions, which collaborate with the government in imposing austerity. It raises burning political issues.

To move forward, the movement must turn to the working class, the only social force that is capable of securing a victory through struggle. A real opposition to the attacks by Macron and the super-rich can develop

independently of the trade unions, which support the government and have made clear their hostility to the “Yellow Vest” protests from the outset. It can, moreover, only develop independently of the allies of the unions, including Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s Unsubmissive France and the New Anticapitalist Party.

To prevent the unions and pseudo-left groups from strangling the movement—including by placing themselves at its head in order to derail it, demoralize it, and hand the initiative to the government—workers require organizations of struggle that are independent of the unions. It poses the question of which class holds power, and the building of a revolutionary leadership based on the perspective of the taking of power by the working class.

Over the weekend, protesters in Marseille, Amiens and Paris spoke with the WSW.

In Marseille, Johanna, a public employee, and Sylvain, a site foreman in a pipe works, joined the protest. Johanna said, “The taxes are a drop in the bucket. It has gone way beyond that. We have had enough. We are sure that there are other solutions, and we’ve had enough of being controlled by lobbyists. We want to go back to a democracy, with increases in the minimum wage, reduction in taxes and the right to accept all important laws by referendum. We are sure there are plenty of solutions. The people must take back the power.

Sylvain added, “Macron is continuing the work of his predecessors, but faster. Really we are sick of all these corrupt governments. We don’t know who really runs the world. It’s clear in every country. We hope this movement spreads everywhere. We can see public consciousness growing. We want to live properly. We’ve had enough of watching people starving in Africa. We want to protect the planet and protect our

jobs.”

“It is a shame that the rail workers were on their own [when they went on strike this year]. The people weren’t there, but today, the people are waking up. The dockworkers fought for us. We were not there, but now the whole of France has to move.”

Lucie works taking orders at the Leclerc supermarket and department store. “We are against the rise in taxes,” she said. “We will have less purchasing power. How will we be able to feed our families? Our salaries let us survive, not live. Macron is not listening to what we’re saying. He has to listen to us, understand us, and see the way we live. Even if we have to all fight together, we will change things.”

“If you are here today it’s because you are not completely in agreement with the unions, because you don’t believe what they say. This government is a catastrophe. It is killing France. We are fighting for our children and grandchildren. We hope we can push them back.

“It’s a mess everywhere. The whole world is in a horrible state. I don’t know how Macron will respond, but we are going to the end.” She added that Macron’s hailing of Pétain “made no sense.”

A retired participant at Porte Maillot station in Paris said:

“I came to protest because I think it’s always the same people who bear the cost of tax increases, the loss of purchasing power, and all of that. Today it is because of the diesel tax. Everyone knows the cost of diesel is 70 percent taxes.

“Personally, I am already retired. My wife and I have lost 1,000 euros in purchasing power every year. We can’t continue like this. The people cannot. We will not allow it any longer. We don’t live properly anymore. How can we? Anyone who doesn’t have a roof over their head is finished.

“They say they will reduce the housing tax, but it is only 200 euros a year. How does this compare to 1,000 euros?”

In Amiens, a worker at the Clinique d’Europe private hospital who was part of a group blocking the central station, said, as cars honked in support, “With the retirement pension I am supposed to live on soon, I cannot accept price increases.” His colleague added: “Macron is the president of the rich.”



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