

Egypt bans yellow vest sales as French protesters reject Macron's concessions

Alex Lantier

11 December 2018

The bloody Egyptian dictatorship of General Abdel Fattah al Sisi is banning the sale of yellow vests, as protests spread internationally in sympathy with the movement against French President Emmanuel Macron. This came as “yellow vest” protesters in France rejected Macron’s offer of concessions in an attempt to placate the growing movement.

The Sisi dictatorship is terrified that growing working class anger in Egypt and across North Africa could erupt around “yellow vest” protests like those in France. Cairo retailers contacted by AP said police ordered them not to sell the vests until after the protests on January 25 of next year—the eighth anniversary of the 2011 revolution that toppled the hated dictator Hosni Mubarak. Since it took power in 2013 in a bloody military coup, the Sisi regime has banned such protests and sent riot police to beat or kill anyone who defied the ban.

“The police came here a few days back and told us to stop selling them. We asked why, they said they were acting on instructions,” one retailer told AP. Another said, “They seem not to want anyone to do what they are doing in France.”

Industrial safety equipment distributors are reportedly under orders not to sell yellow vests to walk-in customers, but only to verified construction companies who have police permission. Many press outlets reported that the Egyptian Interior Ministry did not answer requests for comments on the yellow vest ban.

Sisi is reportedly a close friend of former French President François Hollande, and French Internet spying firms are deeply implicated in surveillance of the Egyptian population and the identification of individuals via Internet and social media to be arrested and tortured. Despite their best efforts, however, bread riots, textile workers strikes and protests against Sisi’s privatizations and food subsidy cuts have repeatedly shaken Egypt in the last two years.

Sisi’s attempted preemptive strike against “yellow vest” protests in Egypt points to the panic of governments worldwide at the radicalization of the international working class. Demands for social equality, wage increases, an end to militarism and repression and the ouster of unpopular governments, that drive the yellow vest protests in France, are shared by workers and toiling people in every country. As Sisi desperately tries to keep such protests from spreading to Egypt, various forces are calling such protests from one country to the next.

In Europe, Belgian police violently cracked down on Friday’s “yellow vest” protest in Brussels, as protesters also donned yellow vests in the Netherlands and Bulgaria, and also Iraq. After a “yellow vest” protest in Basra against contaminated water and poor city services under the NATO-backed neo-colonial regime, protesters in Baghdad also wore yellow vests to marches on December 7 to show their solidarity with the Basra protests.

Particularly after the brutal police crackdowns in Brussels and on Saturday in Paris, protests are spreading across Africa. In Burkina Faso, a Facebook group has been set up calling for such protests on December 13. It states: “So on December 13, 2018, across Burkina Faso, let us occupy without violence and pacifically every street corner and intersection in our neighborhoods in the cities and villages across the entire country to say: –No to the rise in fuel prices // –No to injustice in all its forms.”

In Tunisia, a recently-founded Facebook group of “Red Vests” issued its first statement on December 7. It denounced the “failure and corruption” of the Tunisian political system and the government’s “policy of systematic impoverishment” of the population. This came after a strikes last week by Tunisian teachers against wage cuts.

As in Egypt, anger in Tunisia is expected to erupt on January 14, on the eighth anniversary of the 2011 revolution that ousted European-backed dictator Zine El

Abedine Ben Ali. The General Union of Tunisian Labor (UGTT) trade union, which was a close supporter of the Ben Ali dictatorship, felt compelled to call two symbolic, one-day strikes in the public sector last month. Calls are circulating for a general strike in Tunisia next month.

In Algeria, protesters donned yellow vests and joined in a march in Béjaïa yesterday, prompting worry in bourgeois media. Noting the “gloomy social climate due to the drastic fall in Algerians’ purchasing power,” *Mondafrique* wrote that protests “have caused an all-out political crisis in France. Is Algeria safe from a possible, indeed probable infection?”

The upsurge of the class struggle and growing solidarity with the “yellow vest” protests in Africa underscore again that the greatest ally of workers in France mobilizing against Macron is the international working class. It has been nearly eight years since the first great revolutionary mobilization of the working class in the 21st century toppled two dictators in North Africa. Now, as calls for general strikes grow in France, Tunisia and across the region, the class struggle is moving objectively towards an eruption of an international general strike.

The task of preparing and organizing such a struggle cannot be left to the union bureaucracies. They support the reactionary national governments, divide the working class along national lines, and were bitterly hostile to the initial “yellow vest” protests in France. Workers will have to take this struggle out of the hands of the unions, and unify their struggles against the unions and the middle class parties affiliated to the unions—all of whom endorsed the bloody European imperialist wars in Libya, Syria and Mali that followed the 2011 revolutions.

As the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) has stressed, this requires first and foremost building an Marxist political vanguard in the international working class, to offer it revolutionary leadership.

The explosive growth of the class struggle has exposed middle class forces like the Pabloite New Anti-capitalist Party and Jean-Luc Mélenchon in France. Having endorsed the 2011 Libyan war that led to the subsequent NATO onslaught against Africa as a “humanitarian” endeavor, they refused to give any perspective to oppose Macron during the run-off in last year’s presidential elections. Now, they are rejected by broad layers of the “yellow vest” movement, some of whose members rejected Mélenchon’s outreach by telling him to go see “his friend Macron.”

Their aim to tie protesters in France to the perspective

of some type of trade union talks and deals with Macron—a perspective rejected by the “yellow vest” protesters—is a trap for the workers. This came to the fore as “yellow vest” protesters dismissed Macron’s ineffectual 13-minute speech last night, in which he tried to convince them to give up the fight.

Macron insisted he would not repeal the tax cut on the rich, abandon plans for deep cuts to unemployment insurance and pensions, or let up on his standing order for a crackdown on protests. Having threatened the protesters, he offered them a 100 euro monthly (6.7 percent) increase in the minimum wage, a partial repeal of tax hikes on retirees, and tax cuts on overtime pay. Finally he appealed to anti-immigrant racism, calling for an “unprecedented” public debate on national identity and “secularism,” now used as a code word for attacks on Muslim headscarves.

This proposal of an official policy of inciting anti-Muslim racism is dictated primarily by police and military considerations. The French ruling class does not want the emergence of a joint struggle of European and African workers that would cut across its wars, nor a unification of “yellow vest” and immigrant workers that would hamper its police crackdown at home. The way forward for workers is to reject Macron’s neo-fascistic debate with contempt, and seek unity with their class brothers and sisters of all ethnic and religious origins.

Commenters on “yellow vest” Facebook pages largely rejected Macron’s offer, pointing out that it aimed to divide the protesters based on whether or not they are on minimum jobs, retired, etc. “Don’t fall into the trap! All he wants to do is set us against each other to end the movement! So let’s stay united and continue so that each one of us gains a victory,” read one post on the *France en colère* page, which was overwhelmingly opposed to Macron’s speech.

A new “yellow vest” protest next Saturday in downtown Paris has been called.



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)