

Fifth French “yellow vest” protest opposes Macron government

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“Yellow vest” protesters mobilized for a fifth day of action in France on Saturday, facing a new police crackdown and clashes centered in provincial cities, as fewer protesters traveled to Paris.

The interior ministry claimed that some 66,000 people had protested across France, down by half after the brutal crackdown organized the previous week in Paris. The mobilization in the capital was certainly smaller this Saturday, as thousands marched and clashed with police in large provincial cities across the country.

In Paris, several thousand protested and 144 people were held in preventive detention, amid a new massive police clampdown in the capital. Large parts of the city and subway system were shut down, as armored cars, water cannon, horse-mounted military police, and riot police firing rubber bullets and tear gas occupied much of the city.

WSWS reporters spoke to “yellow vest” protesters in Paris. One group of workers from Picardie said, “They always take from the poor and the middle class, never the rich. We fight to defend our purchasing power, for our children, so we can make it to the end of the month. We haven’t had the money to go on vacation for five years, so we came to Paris to be heard. But then we are repressed by the riot police, we are tear-gassed, shot at with rubber bullets, everything. It is a dictatorship now and nothing else.”

Referring to the state of emergency and the recent Islamist shooting in Strasbourg, they said, “The state of emergency was a pretext to block us a little bit more.” They could not explain why “a yellow vest protester arriving in Paris gets goggles or protective clothing confiscated like a criminal, but a man arriving with a gun is free to shoot people at a Strasbourg Christmas market : “That’s where you see we are in a

dictatorship.”

Another group of construction workers from Picardie told the WSWS, “We come to demonstrate peacefully but even so they don’t want to let us do so... We’re here because we have absolutely had enough of this government, we want it to quit and we want power to go to the people.”

“When you get in your car to go to a work site and you hear about the salaries the parliamentarians are earning, and how they set up embezzlement schemes, honestly you don’t want to listen anymore because you feel so sickened,” one added. “Everyone works hard, everyone has problems at the end of the month.”

Asked about the CGT trade union’s criticisms of the “yellow vest” protesters, one construction worker replied, “Really, frankly, we’ve had enough of the unions. Personally, I think if you see how the unions operate in the workplaces it’s a mafia. You see a guy who’s a union official, he’s sitting pretty, and if you say something he’ll tell you, ‘Look I’m CGT, don’t make trouble.’ If you’re working somewhere and you’re not a union guy and you say you don’t agree with them, they go after you.”

He added, “If they represented the workers that would be good, but the way they work in France is not like that. Basically they’re a mafia: if you don’t toe their line, you could be lying down dying with your mouth open and they wouldn’t help you.”

Both Toulouse and Bordeaux in the southwest saw approximately 5,000 people marching, more than the Paris march. Protests in Bordeaux led to clashes with police around Pey-Berland square, with 22 wounded including six from the security forces, and 27 people held in preventive detention on charges of “bearing projectiles prohibited weapons, preparing violence or damages.”

In Toulouse, a center of high school protests against President Emmanuel Macron's return to the draft and his school reforms, the police deployed armored cars against the "yellow vests." Protesters kneeled on the ground in front of police, replicating the posture military police forced high school protesters to adopt, handcuffed, in the now infamous video at Mantes-la-Jolie. Clashes broke out as the Toulouse protest broke up, leading to 31 arrests and 29 wounded, including 21 among the security forces.

In Marseille, where several thousand "yellow vests" marched, the police totally sealed off the Old Port, again relying on armored vehicles to oppose the protesters. Elements of the Stalinist General Confederation of Labor (CGT) and the New Anticapitalist Party (NPA) sought to join the "yellow vest" protests and control where the protesters marched, as in Toulouse. This provoked bitter comments from the "yellow vests," who launched their movement independently of the unions and resent the CGT's denunciation of them as neo-fascistic.

"Yellow vest" protesters in Marseille spoke out to criticize the CGT, which has a long record of working closely to negotiate austerity with successive social democratic or right-wing governments. "It's been 40 years that they have been pissing us off. I don't want to be with them now," one Marseille protester told *La Provence* about the CGT.

In Saint-Etienne, about 2,000 people marched to calls of "Macron, resign!" Approximately 50 were arrested after clashes broke out later in the day as police tried to block Carnot square. There was widespread shock and opposition as it emerged that the police had shot a France3 journalist with a rubber bullet. France3 officials protested the measure, writing on Twitter, "It is high time that journalists, who are observers by nature, are not taken as targets by anyone."



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