

Yellow vest protesters rally across France on New Year's Eve

Our reporters
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On New Year's Eve, yellow vest protesters across France demonstrated against President Emmanuel Macron to show their determination to continue their protests. *World Socialist Web Site* reporters spoke to yellow vests protesting on the Champs-Élysées in Paris, surrounded by heavy police deployments.

The interviews highlighted political issues upon which protesters in struggle against Macron are reflecting with increasing seriousness. The yellow vests expressed their growing consciousness of the international and working class character of their demands, and their opposition to social inequality, war and the current political system.

The WSWS spoke to Pascal, who said: “We have been protesting peacefully for seven weeks... Today, for Frenchmen who work, it is impossible to make ends meet.”

He said he supported an international struggle: “I'm a worker on the job, a manual worker, so that is absolutely what we need... The Belgians were already blockading refineries before our protest on November 17. We must support each other. Why should France be more important than other countries? There are 27 countries in the European Union. All the countries have to struggle together or it will do no good.”

He said the union bureaucracies and allied political parties would not organize such a struggle: “Frankly, we have been mobilized since the first protest on November 17, and we didn't see a single union... The unions are alone on their side. They never allied with the yellow vests.” He added, “They are not playing the same game we are... We should all be on the same side, so to speak. We should all be in struggle together—truck drivers, fishermen, everyone.”

The WSWS also interviewed four yellow vests who spoke out against conditions facing young workers in

France. André said, “Even when we're working, we can't make it to the end of the month. Financially, it doesn't work. We get our salary, lots of costs are taken off the top and we have nothing left to live on. We are the working poor. You know, I work hard and I'm forced to go to the food pantries. I don't think that is acceptable.”

Alexandre added, “Then people work 40 to 45 hours per week on unregistered jobs because they have no choice. You're paid nothing and treated like dirt, like little underlings.”

Virginie said, “I'm the mother of a little four-year-old boy. I work two jobs, 40 hours a week, and I'm paid 200 euros. And by the 15th of the month, nothing is left. About 1,000 euros are withheld for rent, utilities, child care because my work schedule is impossible and so I need someone to watch my child. And there you go. All the basics are paid for at the beginning of the month, and by the 15th I have nothing, I survive with some social help for families.”

She added that the yellow vests would not be satisfied with Macron's promise of a small increase in the minimum wage: “What he's promising is just crumbs... As to the so-called minimum wage increase, he's not raising the minimum wage, but increasing a bonus. Then the agency paying the bonus said no, no, we can't do that immediately. You will have to wait until June.”

They stressed their solidarity with strikes and protests around the world that are echoing the yellow vest movement. Virginie said, “We must have solidarity because looking at the big picture, it is today's society that makes us nothings, as Mr. Macron called us, so that we are the ones who struggle to get by. And in every country, it is the same. The poor vastly outnumber the rich. Wealth is too centralized in the hands of a tiny number of people.”

André added, “I would like to thank other countries that are continuing the struggle, at least this means that things can change.”

Christian stressed his opposition to imperialist war and called for a profound change in political life. He said, “Why should there be wars in the world caused by financial interests? I know some soldiers. One told me: ‘We are going over there to kill people for some reason. I don’t even know why I’m killing these people, but ultimately I’m being told to do it.’

“I find it appalling that this person has to go kill others for financial interests. We want a world in peace where everyone can get out of poverty and oppression.”

Like virtually all yellow vests, he also stressed his disillusionment with the union bureaucracies as organizations that claim to defend workers’ interests.

He said, “We want to forge politics anew and totally rework the trade unions, so they will become what they were 100 years ago, or anyway sometime before I was born. They supported and went with the people. They didn’t oppose the people on the basis of their selfish interests.

“We saw the example of the truckers’ union. They called a strike with us on Monday, then on Friday they had a response from the president. Subsidies were paid directly to the union, then afterwards the truckers did not go on strike.”

The WSWs also interviewed Magalie, a woman from Corsica who had managed a maintenance and transport business before going on disability. She said, “This is my fifth protest. Like everyone else, I have had enough. I am on disability. I have a disability pension of 780 euros and 400 euros in welfare payments. Before I went on disability, I was very well paid, but now I have nothing.”

She explained, “I had a big spinal problem. I was declared disabled. It started with that, then health problems came one after the other, and the health administration does not give a damn. They are fixated on my first disability, and nothing else.

“I have X-rays, my right hip has fissures everywhere. I scheduled a meeting with the health administration so that I would get more reimbursements, but they ask me to work one third of the time, which is not easy when you’re 30 km from the nearest city. So there, they want me to die this way.”

While she stressed that she was very proud of the

performance of her company, she added, “There is no help for small businesses. New start-ups mostly close after a year because there is no other way.”

Asked about the role of the unions, she said: “You must be joking. The trade unions are a big joke... The unions did some good before World War II, or after. It was certainly thanks to them in large part that we got paid vacations, various things. But that was in what year?

“Today, the unions have vast buildings, you have to see them. But what do they do in them? I don’t need them. They have not gotten me anything and they will get me nothing today.”



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