

People's Assembly protesters back yellow vest movement, unity of European workers

Our reporters
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WSWS campaigners spoke to workers and young people, from Britain and internationally, who had made considerable efforts to attend Saturday's People's Assembly demonstration in London. Many expressed support and solidarity with the Yellow Vest movement in France and spoke to the shared experiences of workers in every country.

Liz is a National Health Service (NHS) admin worker in Nottingham. Describing the savage cuts made to the NHS over the last decade, she said, "It's like it was when the Tories were in power in the 1980s. The same is happening again. [NHS] Trusts have massive deficits. There are loads of staff vacancies and patients on trolleys in corridors and you had that in the 1980s. The NHS is being sold off gradually. I'm a low-paid admin staff.

"I think the NHS thing was the best thing that ever happened in Britain and ever since it was created, the Tories, the right wing, have wanted to bring it down."

Asked her view on the fact that Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn is a professed opponent of austerity, but leads a party that is imposing austerity in every council they run nationally, Liz replied, "They are career politicians, so you have Labour and Tory councils doing the same thing. They sell the poor people and workers down the line. I think Labour is still infested with right-wingers, Blairites. I'm not a Labour member but you can only hope that all the right-wing get de-selected.

"There is going to have to be a massive, massive fight. Those in power are not going to give up their positions. We have to fight and if we don't achieve it, we have to go down fighting. And they have to expect us on the street and we have to keep shining a light on the capitalist rats and billionaires."

Asked her thoughts on the Yellow Vest movement, she said, "I belong to [public sector union] Unison and the only way we can change anything is for all workers everywhere to down tools together."

Asked why the unions in Britain had not organised any serious struggle since 2010 and the beginning of mass austerity, in contrast to the willingness of millions to fight it, Liz said, "I think the unions have got a lot to answer for. I think there are a lot of people in the unions, especially at the higher levels, who are quite happy with the status quo. They are quite happy to pay lip service to fighting austerity, but when it comes to down to it, they don't fight."

Liz opposed the recent sell-out pay deal that was implemented by the health trade unions as "a completely flawed deal." The unions falsely sold it to their members as a pay increase, after year of cuts, only for workers to see it for the pay cut it actually was in their subsequent pay packets.

Neco, originally from Turkey, runs a café in north London:

"We need radical change and it needs to be global. I have been studying this for a long time. It goes back to [former Conservative prime ministers] Margaret Thatcher, John Major and continued under the [Labour] Blair government. All the privatisations that have taken place on behalf of the financial elites.

"Enough is enough! There are 320,000 homeless people in this country—that is one in 200—and this is in the sixth biggest economy in the world. The National Health Service is being privatised. Power needs to come back to the people. The financial oligarchy has got to stop controlling everything, including the media, and using it to brainwash people. I include in that the BBC.

"Capitalism is creating poverty and homelessness from Latin America to the Far East. In the United States, you have some of the biggest poverty, but £800 billion is spent on the military.

"We need a different Europe, not one that is against the working class and drawn up by the financial oligarchy, academics and trade unions.

“I have been saying that the demonstrations in the UK should have been happening earlier in solidarity with the Yellow Vests. The Spanish and the French—we all have to unite. That is why I came down today.

“I don’t agree with [Labour Party leader Jeremy] Corbyn 100 percent. He is a social democrat. But once people have the power and realise that they are the ones who carry the economy on their shoulders, they will be able to bring capitalism down.”

Patrick from Marseille was with his friend in Trafalgar Square. Both agreed that any movement against capitalism would have to be in rebellion against the old organisations of the working class, particularly the trade unions.

“Two buildings collapsed in Marseille killing eight people,” he said. “One thousand six hundred were evacuated from other buildings and the mayor didn’t do anything about the housing. Marseille is crumbling and you immediately had 1,600 homeless just in this instant.

“Schools are in the same situation. When it rains, they become flooded and I have known roofs to collapse due to water. My friend is a teacher in Marseille and the roofs are dripping. Many of the children have had no breakfast or lunch and only get one meal a day.

“We have to think for ourselves. Some think the law is wrong and when the law is wrong we have to make the change ourselves. We should put the politicians on the minimum wage and see how they fare.

“I support the movement in France, that’s why I’m here. We’re the same wherever we work. A former minister from years ago has said the police should use live munitions [in France]. The police in Paris have amassed loads of money attacking the protests. Nowadays everything is about the money—it should be about the planet and the future, not about capitalism.”

Hafida, a student from Morocco, said, “The world is run by rich people and the money needs to be distributed to everyone. You can’t believe it is possible that in 2019 people still die for not having anything to eat.

“I’m also concerned about what is happening in Italy as they don’t want people to come into their country. The attack on many countries in Africa and their colonisation is to make people move away from their country so they can take control of their land. The situation is so bad in Italy that [Deputy Prime Minister of Italy Matteo] Salvini is openly racist and says, ‘Italy First.’ We are all human, we should be helping immigrants.”

Steve from France said, “I support the Yellow Vest movement. I am here in solidarity with them. But I am not

in support of the call for a general election. I also believe that, in order to protect the right to demonstrate, one has to make use of it.

“I came with my own mind, I made this banner myself. We can’t protect the planet and still be part of capitalism. You don’t need to study politics for years, it is just obvious.

“I am working in London as a labourer in the building industry. Last year, I was working in France. Since 2008 I worked both here and in France. Like with most people, since 2008, you get paid at the end of the month and then you don’t know. You get in overdraft or in debt to make ends meet from paycheck to paycheck.

“I was in France when the Yellow Vests movement started back in November. But I must also say that it did not come out of the blue. We had been protesting years after years before that.

“In France I was in a trade union, and in London I am part of the Industrial Workers of the World. I have my own reservations, though, about the unions. Even if I am part of a union, I don’t agree with everything they stand for.

“I believe in organising in your workplace and all that, but I don’t believe in big unions. They are corrupt, as with all politicians. That is why I would rather be part of a smaller group that does not get any money from the state or whatever. In France, for instance, the CGT is funded by the government.

Badid, who works in a fish shop near Collioure in south France, said, “In France we are not paid enough. We can just about live, but it’s hard to pay for the food to eat. In every big town in France the people are protesting and I think it’s a good thing. We have to unite.”



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