

Twelfth “yellow vest” protest marches against police repression in France

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On the 12th Saturday protest of the “yellow vests,” demonstrators paid tribute to the victims of police brutality from their movement. Nationally, 58,600 people marched, according to Interior Ministry figures. There were 4,000 demonstrators in Bordeaux, 2,000 in Lille, and 2,000 in Marseille, where 2,500 people marched in another protest against poor housing. In Toulouse, where a large number of protesters marched, the police prefecture refused to supply an estimate of their number.

In Valence, the prefecture mobilized a heavy police detachment against a regional assembly of 5,400 yellow vests. The city was put “under a bell,” its right-wing mayor Nicolas Daragon said.

In Strasbourg, a “yellow vest” press spokesman claimed 8,000 people had protested in an unregistered demonstration. Several clashes took place over the course of the day with the security forces, who arrested 19.

In Paris, more “yellow vests” marched than a week ago—13,800, according to the Occurrence consulting firm, with 33 arrests and 21 detentions. Protesters held signs reading “United and Proud against oppression,” “You don’t fire on your own people,” “Stop Bean-Bag Bullets and Instant Tear Gas Grenades,” “We’re losing our eyes and you are blind,” referring to the over 20 “yellow vests” who have lost eyes to bean-bag bullets. Clashes took place at Republic Square. AFP reported that firemen rescued one protester after he was shot in the face with a bean bag bullet.

As the unions call a protest for February 5, for the first time since the “yellow vest” movement began last November, some officials from the unions or allied petty-bourgeois parties like *Lutte ouvrière* (Workers Struggle, LO) attended the march. LO members tried to criticize the WSWs leaflet, Oppose French unions’

attempts to strangle the “yellow vest” protests! However, masses of “yellow vest” protesters remain just as hostile to the union bureaucracies and increasingly feel the need for a new perspective.

In Paris the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to Baptiste, a temp worker, who said he was marching against capitalism: “We’re against Macron, his free-market policies, everything that goes with it, that means capitalism, that is to say all the pro-business policies that just cause more trouble. Now I’m on the job market, and I see really what the reality of the labour market is: the lower you go, the deeper you’re stuck. I believe this movement can really put an end to Macron and all his reforms, to the bosses, etc. ... Now we hope we will succeed.”

When the WSWs asked Baptiste what balance sheet he drew of two months of struggle, he replied: “We’re stagnating a bit, let’s say, after coming out every Saturday without a clear perspective on what to do. I’m sure there are lots of ways to build a more aggressive movement.”

Baptiste stressed the international character of the problems facing the “yellow vest” protests: “I think it’s an international question, because one sees opposition to free-market policies in every country. So in Britain one has the left, which is becoming very strong. In the United States there is the vote for Trump and all sorts of populist forces and the like. ... The policies that we have endured for so many years in France are leading us nowhere. Apparently what’s happening is a movement of ‘yellow vests,’ but in fact it’s a general problem of all the capitalist societies.”

Asked about Macron’s new anti-hooligan law that restricts the right to protest, he replied: “It kills liberty. ... The so-called state of the rights of man is showing its true face. In fact, you could see it coming from the

beginning, police repression is very strong.”

When WSWS reporters pointed out that Macron had gone to visit military dictator General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in Egypt, Baptiste reacted: “Why are we going there to sell weapons when it is an appalling dictatorship where thousands of people are in jail? He will go make nice speeches about ‘human rights’ to ultimately give weapons to a regime that wants to crush its population.”

The WSWS also interviewed Benoît, who had come from the Auvergne region to Paris: “I’m on welfare ... I’m there also to speak for all those who support me. Their opposition has been growing for a long time: 25, 30 years. I’m 40 and it’s been 25 years since I understood we do not live in a just world. And injustice is global, in any case. Is it normal to have people who have worked all their lives and who are now reduced to living on €300 to €400 per month?”

Asked about Macron’s plan for a “great national debate” on how to satisfy the “yellow vests,” he said: “I’ve been listening to politicians going on for 25 years. They have no idea what our lives are like. They don’t know what a worker’s or a farmer’s life is like. They have nice phrases, but we want real action. That is why we are organizing a movement. Everyone has the right to live well on this planet, to eat and have decent housing.”

Benoît said his goal was a true democracy: “Everyone must take power, everything must be shared. We must have our say. ... We are the ones best placed to know about the problems we have in life, and how pointless suffering can be stopped.” He also added he was doubtful as to what “yellow vest” lists in the European elections would produce: “As I see it, after a little while all of them will be bought, also.”

Asked about the role of the unions, who are organizing tomorrow’s one-day protest strike, Benoît replied: “I don’t believe in the unions. I have worked in factories, you can see clearly that they depend on management. The unions cannot do anything different than what they have been doing.”

This opinion was shared by Guillaume, a metalworker from the Eure-and-Loir department who was protesting to pay “tribute to our wounded, maimed and our dead. It could have been any of us, whether or not we are pacifist, whether or not we go to the hotter spots in the protest, we all get fired on. So now we are

here to pay tribute to all our fellow protesters who were maimed in this movement.”

Guillaume said he did not trust the unions: “We face a rotten political system in which we have no confidence, a trade union system in which we have no confidence. They did not support us, and we do not want them to represent us. ... Before, in our parents’ day, there were many people in the companies who were members of trade unions. But today ... not even 10 percent of the workers are unionized. I think the trade unions have some questions they need to ask themselves.”

Guillaume also pointed to the international character of today’s struggles: “We do not speak enough of other countries, in fact, in many countries things are moving. This movement started essentially on a national basis, maybe that was stupid, but we were thinking about our little France, but actually things go much further than that. We can see we’re governed by large international interests, basically by the banks, period. We’re not treated as human beings, and the people worldwide have had enough.”



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