

French “yellow vests” hold 13th protest against social inequality, police brutality

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After the National Assembly voted a reactionary “anti-hooligan law” allowing police to ban protests without court rulings, a 13th “yellow vest” protest went ahead amid tensions with police. The “yellow vests” were 51,400 across France, according to the Interior Ministry, while the “yellow vests” themselves issued a “yellow number” estimate of 116,000. At least 3,000 mobile riot police units were deployed in Paris along with other police intervention units, and approximately 50 riot police squads in the rest of France.

In Toulouse, the *Dépêche du Midi* counted 5,000 to 7,000 protesters, while *Sud Ouest* counted 4,000 to 5,000 protesters in Bordeaux. In Lyon, police clashed violently with 4,000 “yellow vests” whom they barred from marching to the centre of the city, firing tear gas grenades. In Marseille and Montpellier, 1,500 people marched.

In Paris, four “yellow vest” protests were declared with the police prefecture. The main demonstration left from the Champs-Élysées to stop before the National Assembly, where clashes broke out. There were also protests before the Senate and the Champ de Mars gardens near the Eiffel Tower. Police deployed armoured vehicles near the Arc of Triumph on the Champs-Élysées.

When clashes broke out near the National Assembly, one protester’s hand was blown off by a GLI tear gas grenade. One witness told *L’Express* the victim was a “yellow vest photographer” who was “taking pictures of people pushing on the palisades of the National Assembly. ... When the cops tried to disperse the crowd, he received a stun grenade at the level of his calf. He wanted to knock it away so it wouldn’t explode in his legs, but it blew up when he touched it.”

The Paris police prefecture indicated at least 39 people were arrested, up from 18 a week ago.

In Paris, WSWs reporters met with Stéphane, who had come to demonstrate against police violence and to demand the resignation of Interior Minister Christophe Castaner: “As far as I’m concerned, this protest is dedicated to all the wounded and the demand for Castaner’s impeachment. In fact, we are telling the president of the Republic to throw out Castaner because he is not doing what he should.”

Stéphane added he is protesting “because unfortunately, I am angry against France because it has a tendency to forget its own people, for a very long time. It’s the same thing everywhere, in every country, in fact. It’s always the same who eat well and the same who are hungry.”

On the trade unions’ attempts to mount joint protests with the “yellow vests,” Stéphane said he was against it: “Frankly I’m a bit hard-line, but I don’t support allying with certain personalities, I don’t want us to develop alliances with trade union officials. If they were going to do something for us, they would have had to do it before. Now it’s too easy, they’re just trying to take us over. That is why I’m not for any political party, either. ... We don’t want to have poster boys who are just there to get closer to the parties, trade unions and the celebrities.”

Asked about how to oppose Macron’s policies, Stéphane replied: “Well at a certain point we’ll need a revolution, there is no point deceiving ourselves. Given that he wants to just continue with his policies that make France unliveable, we have to go to the struggle and show that we won’t put up with it. There are French people who are hungry. We will need a revolution, whether it is a peaceful citizens’ revolution or a more forceful revolution. But it will be needed in some way, that we should be clear on.”

The WSWs also met Marina, a unionized nurse who

had come to protest Saturday “to get more purchasing power, and for my job as well. As a nurse, we are given less and less staff to do our work, and the state gives less and less money. We must change how the state works. The rich should pay also. I’m not saying I would refuse to pay taxes, it’s OK for everyone to pay taxes, but the taxes should be well distributed.”

Marina explained that “in the hospitals we are paid based on numbers established by the Social Security authority. I work on dialysis. So, for example, a dialysis that was paid 300 euros in our hospital before is now only paid 200 euros. So, of course, we have to cut spending somewhere. The hospital directors save money on staff salaries, because that is the largest expense. So we are constantly working with skeleton staff, we don’t have time to talk among ourselves. And then people in the emergency room sometimes wait 8 to 10 hours to be treated.”

Asked what balance sheet she drew of the movement, Marine said: “I come from the Moselle area around Metz. There we’ve been blockading a traffic roundabout for almost three months and it’s worth asking what we got out of it. I’m unionized and I’ve been protesting for a long time, and I thought people weren’t fighting hard enough. So what I conclude is that people are starting to move more than before, and I’m happy. And we also see solidarity from people who give us money on the traffic roundabouts so we can organize protests, leaflets, everything.”

She added, “There is a lot of solidarity for us, but more could be done. There are far too many people who are at home and doing nothing. ... When I mention the unions, I know there are big problems, but we are independent of them. But then we really need a movement that will start in the factories. The problem is that people are always tightening their belts, one strike day is one less day’s work that will be paid by the employers.”

The WSWS also met Franck, who said: “A caste has been ruling us for 200 years, the rule of money whereas we are the people. I would say openly we in the middle class have had enough of paying all the time when it is the super-rich that rule over the remaining 99 percent of the population. And at a certain point we say enough, we need to change the regime. We want to truly live life, we want to be happy. We are sick and tired of being poor.”

Franck also pointed to the international character of the movement against social inequality: “So we must change the system ... That’s especially when you see there are 26 billionaires who own more property than half of humanity. At the world level, that gets to be pretty scary. It has to stop.”



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