

27th weekly “yellow vest” rally in France: Protesters defend Assange, denounce war

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After French President Emmanuel Macron declared Friday that he had satisfied the demands of “yellow vest” protesters and called on them to vote in the European elections, the “yellow vests” took to the streets across France for a 27th weekly Saturday protest. The Interior ministry claimed 15,500 joined the protests, while the “yellow vests” themselves claimed 41,000.

Protests took place in Toulouse, Bordeaux, Lyon, Marseille and Amiens. In Nancy and Reims, protesters came from across France, calling for a “yellow tide to protect the right to protest.” On the façade of the Nancy regional administration, protesters took down the European Union flag and replaced it with a yellow vest. In Reims, there were clashes with riot police, who were filmed pushing a female passer-by to the ground.

The police prefecture said 1,600 “yellow vests” demonstrated in Paris. A Facebook event proposed to “win back the right to demonstrate on the Champs-Élysées avenue,” though the government has banned all protests in that area. Several hundred met near the skyscraper headquarters of oil firm Total, in the La Défense business district, to protest “against fuel price and tax increases.” They were surrounded by a cordon of riot police backed up with buses full of military police. The protesters then marched peacefully towards the Sacré-Coeur church.

The WSWs spoke to “yellow vest” protesters in Paris, who were determined to continue the struggle against the government and the dangers posed by the war drive targeting Iran and the imprisoning of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange.

WSWS reporters met Julien, who works in a call center and came to protest Macron’s economic policies. He said, “The government just defends the interests of the transnational corporations. The level of

social inequality is increasingly shocking. There are many billionaires and millionaires in this country, and so many poor workers and homeless people in Paris. Wages are too low, the monthly minimum wage of 1,100 euros [\$US1,229] is not enough to live on.”

His friend Romain also said he wanted to “defend our democratic rights. The media and the state power are against the ‘yellow vests,’ we saw how they manipulated the story of the Pitié hospital. They claimed that the ‘yellow vests’ were attacking the hospital, but it was false.”

He added, “The media, in any case, they are bourgeois media. We should use the precise term. They defend the world view and the interests of the bourgeoisie. Julian Assange is a true journalist because what we see in France is that the press are propagandists. There are people with press cards but in fact they are there to defend the government and the business community. Assange is a true journalist. He reveals things. That is why he is in danger.”

Asked about the need to unify workers worldwide against social inequality, the war danger and the threats against Assange, Romain said: “I’m an internationalist, of course one needs to have a global perspective because capitalism is global and so struggles against it should be, too. So effectively, we are fighting, I am fighting in France because I am located here. But I am in solidarity with Julian Assange’s fight and those of other struggles around the world. We see peoples are threatened around the world, in Venezuela or the intervention against Iran. As soon as free countries want to be independent, there are economic, military or media campaigns targeting them.”

The WSWs also spoke to a “yellow vest” who wanted to remain anonymous, but said he had come “to resist the absence of solution proposed by this

government. Everything has to be put on the table, much more broadly. I came twice, both times it went off peacefully. We are in struggle, and we hope more and more people will join us. Looking at last week's protests, things are coming together: the 'yellow vests,' hospital strikes, school strikes, rural protests against fuel tax increases."

Asked about the balance sheet of six weeks of protests, he said, "Unlike what the media are saying, things are not going well in the country. There is a lot of discontent, but the media is trying to stifle it."

Asked about the detention of Assange, he replied: "It is the same story. He is being stifled with twisted judicial methods, the rape allegation, etc. You realize that internationally, we do not really have a democracy. Journalists who are doing their job should not be put in jail, which is being done with Assange."

Stressing the war danger, he declared: "To resolve the problems abroad, we must resolve the problems in France, because we are responsible for the problems in Africa, which we colonized. We saw the arms sales to Saudi Arabia destined for Yemen, we are implicated in these wars. We must change the system."

Finally the WSWS met Vincent, a schoolteacher who had come to Paris to protest against inequality: "For six months, we have sought to change the Republic, which is enriching the transnational corporations not the workers, and who are expanding the state's debts."

On Macron's reform of the public schools, Vincent said: "Schools need money. Since the state is slashing funding to municipalities, schools have to make do. The buildings are falling apart. In my classroom, water was dripping, pieces of the ceiling were falling down. In general, we do not have enough teachers, there is neither enough room space nor the number of employees and schoolteachers to run the classes."

On what the "yellow vest" movement would lead to, Vincent said, "We should try to convince as many people as possible to be a bit more radical. It is clear that organizing small marches and going home Saturday night, that doesn't go anywhere. It hasn't gone anywhere for six months. So we need stronger actions or something like that."

Asked about Assange, Vincent expressed his support: "He is someone who should not go to prison, and we should have had him come here to France to protect him. In Britain, he would go to prison and could stay

there until the end of his life. That's clear. The French state should say 'no', we don't accept his extradition."

On US war threats against Iran, Vincent said: "There will undoubtedly be a war at one point or another. France should do everything it can to prevent it, like we did in the Iraq war, even if that did not work. War allows capitalism to survive, it means foreign corporations come and pillage the country after a while. So everything should be done against it."



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