

“Yellow vest” protesters pay tribute at the Communards’ Wall in Paris

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Tens of thousands took part in “yellow vest” protests across France on Saturday, the 28th successive week of demonstrations against the government of President Emmanuel Macron, its policies of austerity, and the growth of poverty, unemployment and social inequality.

The “Yellow Number” Facebook page, which provides a more accurate count of the number of demonstrators than the government and includes small protests, reported that approximately 40,000 people demonstrated, including in every major city, and approximately the same number as the previous week. The interior ministry reported a vastly underestimated figure of just over 12,000.

Several thousand demonstrated in Toulouse, Amiens and Paris and were once again met with violent police repression. In Toulouse, police utilized water cannon and teargas to disperse peaceful protests that had taken place for the entire afternoon. In Paris alone, the police prefect reported 64 arrests and more than 5,000 stops and searches.

A highly significant political event took place in Paris, where around 1,000 people gathered in the morning outside the Père Lachaise Cemetery and marched through the cemetery to the Communards’ Wall. The site honors the massacre of tens of thousands of workers and their families in the bloody suppression of the Paris Commune 148 years ago, in 1871. On May 28, 147 fédérés were lined up against the wall, shot and thrown into a mass grave at the foot of the wall.

Over 100 people sang the Internationale, the song of international workers’ solidarity, at the wall.

“It is the same demands as those of the Commune,” Martine, a social worker, told reporters for the *World Socialist Web Site*. “A revolution, that’s the situation we’re being pushed into. In the end we are not being

listened to and as soon as we say that things are not okay, they gas us and they kettle us. At the Commune, they shot them, and we have not yet arrived at that point. But the rubber bullets are still arms being used against us. So they are pushing us to a revolution.”

From the outset of the “yellow vest” protests, they have been slandered as right-wing and even fascistic by trade union executives like the CGT’s Phillippe Martinez, whose own collaboration with the employers and suppression of working-class resistance for decades has facilitated the transfer of wealth to the rich and immiseration of broad sections of the population. Yet this event underscores the basic fact that the “yellow vest” protests are animated by left-wing opposition to social inequality and points to the deeply embedded traditions of socialism in the working class.

Marie, a social worker from Nanterre in the northern suburbs of Paris, told WSWS reporters that she started attending the “yellow vest” protests because “it is years now that we cannot make it on our salaries. That’s why I came, to try to change things. The handicapped, the elderly, are not respected either. So I am here for them because they cannot protest.

“They have no dignity. I always see today elderly people eating from the bin. I see people who have worked their entire lives and who now cannot make it in retirement. It is completely perverse. Nothing changes, no matter who is in government, who is the president. When the president retires and the other officials, they will have payments and their salary for the rest of their lives. That is money that could be used for social services. That’s why I became a Yellow Vest.”

Marie has worked for 20 years as a carer, and over this time “there has been always a reduction in the amount of time we can spend with patients, more and

more people to see. Today there are 13 patients in a room with three of us, and if someone is sick they are not replaced.” She earns €1,300 per month and noted that “in Paris, that is difficult, and is nothing when you are working until 10 p.m. and on the weekends.”

“We have the usual unions,” she said, including both the General Confederation of Labor and the Workers Force, “but I don’t believe in them. They are not necessarily for us. They’re not representative and don’t fight for us.” The response of the Macron government to the protests showed that “already today we are in a dictatorship. There has not been a protest movement that has been so brutally suppressed as has the ‘yellow vests.’ Teargas, rubber bullets, flash bang grenades, water cannon. It disturbs the government that we are here, that we are expressing a completely legitimate social discontent in a peaceful way.”

“We are the ones who make the workplaces work,” she said, “and that is what Marx said.”

Antoine, a young worker from Mayenne, told our reporters that the issues the “yellow vests” were fighting were problems that “affect Europe and even the entire world. It’s poverty everywhere and it is the fruit of capitalism. As long as it exists, there will be people who will be declassed. We are fighting for everyone.”

Antoine knew of the persecution of WikiLeaks journalist Julian Assange and said he thought he was a hero. “For me, that is a big word. But he is a hero, because he revealed all the atrocities committed in Iraq by the American government. And what has happened to him? He has been imprisoned. And it is seven years that he has been locked up in a room of the embassy. He has not even been granted asylum. He should have been given asylum in another country. He does not deserve prison. He has done his duty as a citizen.”

The wars that Assange helped to expose were “not for nothing,” Antoine said. “I think that behind them there were interests in oil. ... They don’t care that there will be wars, famines and everything. They only think of their interests. What’s more, they don’t tell us everything. For example, there was the sale of arms to Saudi Arabia by France that was proven by journalists. And now what is done? They are threatened with being put in prison and fined because they revealed what is happening.”



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