

French motorists support striking refinery workers

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A team of WSWS reporters visited a petrol station in Drancy, in the outskirts of Paris, to interview motorists struggling with petrol shortages against the backdrop of the refinery strike. Motorists expressed their support for the refinery workers who have been on strike for two weeks against inflation and for wage increases.

The WSWS spoke to Rachid, a clothes seller on the Bobigny market who admits that with the increase in prices, he has had to “increase the prices of my clothes” which people buy less of, which affects his standard of living: “People have less money to buy my stuff so it’s difficult for me to live. I don’t have the money; all the prices of food and essential things are too expensive for me. It’s very difficult to live.”

Guy, a mechanic who was queuing at the petrol station, said: “This is the first time in my life that I have queued like this. It’s true that little by little it affects us.” Still, Guy said he had sympathy for the refinery workers’ strike: “people demanding to have a better salary, a more equal distribution of income, that’s normal.”

Support for striking refinery workers also came from Rayan, a delivery driver: “I’ve already been on strike and it’s always positive. We went on strike with the yellow vests, we had demands that were not met. So, I can understand them. I personally understand it.”

The wage increases promised in the negotiations between refinery management and the union bureaucracies, he added, would not be enough: “It’s a long-term solution they want, because even if they increase their wages by 500 euros, it’s not much. They really need to find long-term solutions so that everyone is happy.”

He denounced the fact that profits made by Total were not given to workers: “The profits are not distributed, they go into the boss’s pocket. I think it’s

too big. In France, there is a problem that has always existed, and the yellow vests agreed on this. It’s that the super-rich don’t get taxed. The super-rich have nothing to worry about. They can continue to get richer, richer and richer. They don’t have to worry about the tax. I’m self-employed and it’s hard even for us. With inflation, it’s €2.30 a liter. Yes, €2.30 a liter, can you imagine €2.30 a liter?”

Rayan then told us about his daily difficulties: “In my daily life, I have to deprive myself of many things. I have to deprive myself. I got married recently, we haven’t even gone on a trip yet. Inflation is not only on petrol, it’s on everything, when you go out, clothes, food, raw materials. Even a loaf of bread, it’s gone up, milk and even water.”

When asked by the WSWS how he thinks this inflation started, Rayan said: “there was the pandemic at first, then the war in Ukraine.”

On the war, Rayan expressed his opposition: “In any case, I am against war. I’m one of those people who think you can fix everything with a discussion. Frankly, I think that war solves nothing, the First World War and the Second World War serve as examples. History tells us that war solves nothing.”

Rayan opposed French intervention in the war in Ukraine: “I feel sorry for the Ukrainian people first of all, because they are our neighbors, it could very well have happened to us. It is important that France does not take part directly in the conflict with Russia, but I do not think it is right that French state money is used to finance the war.”

He continued: “France is the fifth world power, when you see a shortage of petrol like that, when you have trouble managing your own country. There are people dying of hunger. There are people still sleeping outside. This is not good ... the ‘yellow vests’ still haven’t got

their demands.”

Rayan said he voted for Jean Luc Mélenchon in the first round of the presidential elections, hoping for a more left wing policy. However, he went on to express his disillusionment: “I voted for Mr Mélenchon but honestly, everything he proposes is always the same thing, promises not kept. It is still the case that the entire French political system comes down to enriching the rich.”



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