

French “yellow vests” applaud workers’ struggles against social inequality

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Some 69,000 people participated in the eleventh weekly protest of “yellow vests” in France, according to the Interior Ministry. Demonstrators told the *World Socialist Web Site* that they rejected French President Emmanuel Macron’s proposed “great national debate” and hailed workers’ struggles against social inequality around the world.

Discussions with the “yellow vests” revealed great interest in finding a way to mobilize broader opposition to Macron and the banks.

The major provincial cities saw large protests—particularly Toulouse and Bordeaux, where the turnout was 10,000 and 6,000, respectively. Clashes with police led to numerous arrests in these cities. There were also confrontations with police in Dijon, Montpellier, Avignon, Nantes, Lyon and Evreux, where two cars were torched and the French central bank building was attacked, according to the police prefecture.

For the first time since the beginning of the protests, all of the “yellow vests” in Marseille marched together, calling for “unification of the struggle.” Some 4,000 people demonstrated there. Protesters in Marseille intervened to rescue a tourist couple with a baby carriage who were standing nearby and were suddenly attacked with tear gas by the police.

Ilyes, who was at the scene, told *Sputnik News*: “We were...marching near the Old Port, singing. Everyone was in good spirits. The riot police were positioned right and left around the protest, across the road from it. Everything was under control when a policeman threw a grenade for no reason.”

Clashes took place throughout the afternoon. In total, 300 people were arrested across France, including 66 in Paris. There, police claimed that 4,000 people demonstrated.

Several marches were planned—one cleared with the police between the Champs-Élysées and Bastille Square, another from Nation Square to Bastille Square, and finally “a march in solidarity with yellow vests from faraway territories,” going from the Overseas Territory Ministry to Facebook’s Paris headquarters.

For the first time since the beginning of the protests, the “yellow vests” called for meetings on Republic Square to continue the protests with a “yellow night.” Police broke up the event, firing volleys of tear gas.

Earlier that afternoon, Jérôme Rodrigues, an associate of “yellow vest” spokesman Éric Drouet who had called one of the protests, was seriously wounded in the eye when a police grenade exploded less than five meters from where he was standing. He was carried away for an emergency operation.

In Paris, the WSWS spoke to Quyn, a waitress protesting “for social, tax and economic justice in our country, because Macron is favoring the rich, not the poor, the retirees, the handicapped.” She added, “We are demanding Macron’s resignation.”

Quyn praised the development of international opposition to social inequality and authoritarianism: “This movement is developing across the world—for example, in Burkina Faso there are the red vests; in Belgium, Germany and Canada, sort of everywhere. I think this movement will continue in various forms. It motivates everyone to wake up and struggle against the dictatorships of the major powers that control our epoch. I hope that everyone across the world will wake up.”

On the Oxfam report pointing to rising social inequality around the world, Quyn said: “It is scandalous that small minorities own a majority of the wealth. The economic, social and tax system must make all these CEOs pay where they live, to share the

wealth and spread it to workers so they can have a decent salary to live on.”

She stressed that she supported “all the movements against the enslavement of the people, all those who are rising up like the yellow vests against free market capitalism and the oligarchy of the transnational corporations.” She continued: “We need to rise up now...for everyone to be aware that we have enough energy to produce enough to give people a different life. We have all that, but because the governments and the leaders hide what we have, we do not have enough to live, but in fact everything belongs to the people, to all the peoples. It is up to them to win this struggle.”

WSWS reporters also interviewed Rudis, who had traveled from Limoges and works in industrial maintenance: “We want a better distribution of wealth,” he said, “very simply that something be distributed to those who need it. It would be good to change the entire world. Those who are here are nurses, retirees, everyone basically.”

On the “great national debate,” Rudis was unambiguously hostile: “It’s just talk. We aren’t free to go there, we can’t say what we want... Anyway, it’s been many years that it has all just been talk.”

Rudis called for unifying workers of all countries in struggle against the European Union and austerity. “That would be a good idea,” he said, “a way of rebuilding Europe along lines we have chosen, between the European populations, the European and even world population. If we can, this would be ideal because it’s not just us. Africa and everyone are suffering. We are in a country that one can say doesn’t have so much to complain about, but it would be good for everyone to be able to stand proudly, stop the plundering of Africa and all of that.”

On the role of the unions and their positions on the “yellow vests,” Rudis said: “The unions are disguised politicians. They make agreements just for their own interests. I work in a factory with 50 workers but two unions. And they don’t give a shit about us. The union bureaucrats can sit pretty in the factories.”

The WSWS also spoke to Stéphane, who called for the setting up of “citizen-initiated referendums, which will allow the French people to decide on certain questions, propose or abrogate laws hostile to the interests of the people, or even recall an elected official if he acts against the interests of the people.” He

continued: “There are different popular assemblies in various areas of France that are interesting, where people are debating, learning or politically being awakened, because we have been held out of politics for a long time.”

Stéphane stressed that workers will get nothing from the “great national debate” offered by Macron: “Mr. Macron’s national debate does not concern the ‘yellow vests.’ It’s a national debate to promote himself. The European elections are coming soon. It is PR.”

Stéphane told the WSWS that he opposes the attempts to put together a “yellow vest” electoral list for the European elections: “Now we’ve seen that there are some ‘yellow vests’ trying to get together to advance an electoral list for the European elections. The vast majority of the ‘yellow vests’ is totally against that... We are not partisan, because the ‘yellow vests’ are a movement representing the people.”



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