

No to Macron's maneuvers to strangle the Yellow Vest protests in France

By Alex Lantier
27 November 2018

It has been 10 days since a quarter-million people wearing Yellow Vests first protested on November 17 against French President Emmanuel Macron's plans for a fuel tax hike. The deep opposition provoked by the policies of austerity and militarism carried out by Macron in France and the European Union across Europe, has rapidly come to the fore. Deep social anger against social inequality and the arrogance of Macron, the former banker and "president of the rich," is building not only among Yellow Vest protesters, but tens of millions of workers.

Despite the violent repression of Sunday's Paris protest, Yellow Vest protests are continuing and allying with numerous strike movements unfolding at the European level. Port, Amazon and oil refinery workers are on strike and defending roadblocks set up by the Yellow Vest protesters. Their demands—for Macron to resign, for an end to social inequality and attacks on social rights, and against a European army—are taking on an ever more working-class character.

Faced with the eruption of social anger, Macron is slated to speak this evening after discussions with trade unions and NGOs on how to react to the protests. At the same time, the press is trying to impose a "leadership" for the Yellow Vests, a socially and politically heterogeneous movement, to "represent" the protesters in talks with Macron and the state.

These negotiations are a trap for workers and middle-class people in the Yellow Vest movement. Fifty years after the May-June 1968 general strike, there will be no reformist outcome of the class struggle; Macron will give at most only crumbs. The way forward is to reject these fraudulent negotiations and turn to the working class. Independent organizations of struggle and a new political leadership are required in order to build a movement that raises before workers in

France and across Europe the question of the transfer of state power to the working class.

Yesterday, Macron adviser and French Democratic Labor Confederation (CFDT) union leader Laurent Berger, who is leading today's talks, proposed, in an interview with *Le Parisien*, "concrete measures" to solve the crisis. Having "run into a wall with [Prime Minister] Edouard Philippe," Berger is now supposedly launching a struggle for Macron's soul, *Le Parisien* writes with a straight face, to determine whether "Macron the former banker or Emmanuel the candidate of empathy wins out."

What Berger is proposing "concretely" is to ram through the fuel tax hike and continue with the austerity agenda of Macron the banker. "The state cannot do everything" and "I certainly cannot ask the head of state to step down," Berger declares. Instead, "We must make sure that together with the fuel tax increase, there are accompanying measures that make it painless for French people." The only measure he proposed was to give some financial aid for "carpooling plans, ecological transport, and thermal renovation."

According to government spokesman Benjamin Griveaux, Macron is proposing "a change of method but not a change in policy." In short, some PR initiatives will be taken to try to sell a presidency that the Yellow Vests reject and the overwhelming majority of the population despises. AFP concluded: "A priori, there will be no major financial decisions or moratorium on the fuel tax hike that triggered the explosion."

How to impose negotiations on a diffuse, heterogeneous movement in order to sell it out? The press is now promoting a "delegation" composed of eight Yellow Vests who claim to speak for the

movement and to want talks with Macron, while nonetheless claiming to be “apolitical.” The eight include several entrepreneurs, an air force veteran and a CFDT union official who is demanding to “rapidly” start talks with the state and wind down the protests: “We cannot paralyze the country for three months, we must hold negotiations.”

The initiator of one of the initial Yellow Vest calls on Facebook, truck driver Eric Drouet, is also in this body, apparently without great enthusiasm. He declared, “Nothing will be decided by the eight people of this delegation.”

At the same time, *Le Parisien* is hysterically denouncing the danger of a revolutionary perspective influencing the Yellow Vests: “Certain professional troublemakers have invited themselves into this movement, proposing only to destroy everything and, why not, to deny and smash even the democratic model of elections. The Yellow Jackets provide a platform for the belching of these birds of ill omen by constantly dwelling on the same dogmas.”

Such insults deserve the same contempt as the trade union talks proposed by Berger. It is not the Yellow Vests or developing working class opposition to Macron that threaten democracy, but the Macron government, and the trade unions and their political allies who are trying to strangle opposition to Macron with fraudulent negotiations.

It is time to take the revolutionary road. There is nothing to negotiate with Macron. Elected by default against the neo-fascist Marine Le Pen, ruling with a legislative majority chosen by fewer than half of French voters, he imposes the naked diktat of the banks. His plan to spend €300 billion by 2024 on a European army, and his austerity policy—based on a labor law adopted without a parliamentary vote, under a state of emergency suspending basic democratic rights, and despite the opposition of the overwhelming majority of Frenchmen—have no legitimacy whatsoever.

The Yellow Vests cannot pressure Macron to change course and defend their social rights. Bled white by decades of deindustrialization and austerity that created the fortunes of a parasitic aristocracy of multibillionaires, crumbling under its debts, European capitalism no longer has the resources for policies of social compromise, as it did in 1968. And indeed, the

trade unions and the middle-class parties like the New Anti-capitalist Party that emerged from the post-1968 middle-class student movement have all stood aloof from or even denounced the Yellow Vests.

What is to be done? The task is to organize the working class in France and Europe and to provide it with an internationalist revolutionary strategy and perspective to overthrow the financial aristocracy and take power. This vindicates the perspectives formulated by the WSWS on the protests then emerging in France:

“The revolutionary struggles developing against Macron will inevitably bring workers into conflict with the parties of what has passed for the post-1968 ‘left.’ This underscores the significance of the foundation in 2016 of the Parti de l’égalité socialiste (PES), the French section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI). It re-established the presence of Trotskyism in France, fighting for the revolutionary mobilization of the working class against the pseudo-left and all the capitalist parties.

“As the union bureaucracies openly participate in implementing austerity, the PES calls for the formation of rank-and-file organizations in workplaces, schools and working-class communities across France. These are critical to provide workers and youth with forums to discuss and organize opposition to the social attacks and war plans of the entire political establishment.”

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