

Left Party publications denounce protest movement in France

By Johannes Stern
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Anyone wishing to know how the Left Party and its trade union and pseudo-left milieu would react to a social uprising in Germany has only to take a look at what the newspapers in solidarity with the party have to say about the demonstrations against the Macron government in France.

The headline, “The Language of Violence,” greets readers of Monday’s *Neues Deutschland* (ND), traditionally associated with the Left Party. The daily was referring to the mass protests last weekend by the “Yellow Vests” movement, which is demonstrating against higher petrol taxes in France. Protesters blocked roads and demanded the resignation of French President Emmanuel Macron.

In two separate articles, ND spreads the lies of the French government and the police, which have claimed that the violence in Paris stems from the demonstrators. “Paving stones were tossed at police officers, barricades were erected, shops plundered. The police reacted with tear gas and water cannon,” ND writes in its cover story. The “pre-Christmas Avenue des Champs-Élysées” presented “a picture of devastation.”

Without a hint of criticism, the ND cited Macron’s condemnation of the protests: “Shame on those who attacked the security forces, shame on those who used violence against other citizens and journalists,” the French president said. ND then reprinted the propaganda of the French state authorities blaming “violent extremists who took advantage of the opportunity to riot.”

Even more hostile was a Page 5 article titled “Yellow Vests Groomed for Violence.” At the start of the article, ND’s French correspondent Ralf Klingsieck suggested that the Paris demonstration should not even have taken place, while presenting salacious details that solicit reader sympathy for the police.

“The Champs-Élysées presents a picture of devastation,” Klingsieck writes. “The Yellow Vests demonstrations on Saturday in Paris, which were not approved by the police, degenerated into violence.”

“Sections of the approximately 8,000 demonstrators who were prevented from marching in the direction of Place de la Concorde had torn up the pavement to throw stones at the police, who in turn reacted with tear gas and water cannons,” the article continues, reading much like a police report. “In some places, chairs and benches were piled up in the street to make barricades and then set afire. At the fringes of the demonstration, shop windows were smashed and displays plundered. It took hours for the police to restore calm.”

Klingsieck also regurgitates the official propaganda of the security authorities without comment: “Their demonstration in Paris was infiltrated by violent right-wing extremists and thugs of the ‘black blocks’ who disguised themselves by wearing yellow vests, French interior minister Christophe Castaner told the press.”

All of these claims are lies. In fact, it was the police who, from the beginning, were “groomed for violence” and used the “language of violence.” The security forces started the clashes on the Champs-Élysées and were responsible for most of the riots. Immediately after demonstrators set up the first roadblocks, police units responded with water cannon, rubber bullets and tear gas. Policemen lashed out at the demonstrators with clubs and tried to encircle them. In response, some demonstrators sought to defend themselves with paving stones and set off fireworks.

Junge Welt, the other daily paper close to the Left Party, more or less admitted in its editorial that the violence stemmed from the police, but then also sought to discredit the protests. “Both the neo-fascist

formation ‘Rassemblement Nationale’ (RN, formerly National Front) led by Marine Le Pen and the right-wing conservative ‘Les Républicains’ of former President Nicolas Sarkozy used the growing resistance for their own purposes,” the paper wrote. According to “opinion polls support for both parties is currently increasing.”

This claim corresponds to the stance of the French unions and pseudo-lefts, who argue that the protests merely play into the hands of the extreme right. In reality, figures like Sarkozy are widely hated, while the far right is increasingly denouncing the “Yellow Vest” protesters as left-wing violent extremists. Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, the niece of RN leader Marine Le Pen, said the movement was “full of far-left militants. We heard people saying, ‘Capitalism is dead!’ If that’s the ultra right, then it has changed considerably.”

The publications around the Left Party are hostile to the protests in France because they are developing independently of the established political parties and unions.

“The Yellow Vests movement sprang up spontaneously some weeks ago to protest against the loss of purchasing power through a series of tax hikes and, above all, the increase in fuel tax planned for 1 January,” the ND notes, before expressing its central concern. “The unions were completely surprised by this and, like the political parties, had no influence on the movement, which organised itself through forums on the Internet.”

In recent days, the protests of the “Yellow Vests” have coincided with a series of strikes across Europe. In France, striking port, refinery and Amazon workers have defended the roadblocks set up by the “Yellow Vests.” The Left Party regards this development, along with the goals of the “Yellow Vests” movement, as a threat. In fact, the demands for Macron’s resignation, an end to social inequality, and the militarisation of Europe can only be won through the mobilisation of the French and European working class on the basis of an international socialist programme.

The Left Party, which articulates the interests of the privileged middle classes, is on the other side of the barricades in the class struggle. In the 2014 European elections, the party pasted placards reading “Revolution—No, Thanks!” signalling to the ruling

class that it would do everything necessary to stop a revolutionary development. Four years later it is clear what that means. In recent weeks, leaders of the Left Party have lined up behind Macron and his plans for a European army under German-French leadership. The ND has also published a comment describing Macron’s plans for an “EU army” as a “terrific idea.”

The *World Socialist Web Site* wrote at the time: “It is evident that the construction of a European military union and the preparations for war are also directed against growing social and political domestic opposition. Significantly, in his Berlin speech, Macron sought the support of the German bourgeoisie as hundreds of thousands protested in France against higher petrol taxes. Protesters blocked roads and demanded the resignation of the ‘president of the rich’. The fact that Macron’s appeal has been applauded by the Left Party speaks volumes about the pro-imperialist and anti-worker character of the organisation.”

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