

UK workers, young people defend Yellow Vest protests in France: “I only wish that we could do it here as well!”

By our reporters
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Ibrahim is a local authority worker who lives in London. He spoke to WSWs reporters at Ladbroke Grove tube station. He had watched a news report on the protests in France and was appalled by the police behaviour towards school children who were forced to kneel on the ground handcuffed.

“Many of these children joined in solidarity with the yellow vest protesters because they are living through and experiencing the hardship and struggle of their parents. The politicians in charge don’t care about the working class. Look at the Brexit deal, nobody knows what they are doing.

“Solidarity of workers from around the world uniting together is the only way forward. At the end of the day, it’s the working people that make everything and keep society running.”

Ladbroke Grove is a short distance from Grenfell Tower, where 72 residents died in an inferno in June 2017. Ibrahim said, “It doesn’t matter what political party is in power, they are all sabotaging social housing. The Grenfell fire disaster is an example of this. All they are interested in is gentrification and profit.”

WSWS reporters spoke to shoppers on the precinct in Birkenhead in the northwest of England—one of the poorest areas of the country and where shipyard workers recently took strike action against the threat of 241 redundancies at Cammell Laird.

Mick, who once worked at Cammell Laird said, with a fisted salute, “Solidarity to the French workers. I agree with what you are doing, I only wish that we could do it here as well!”

Asked her opinion on the French protests, housewife **Marie** said, “Anyone who’s making a stand has got to be supported. There needs to be a revolution. People need to come together in France. The bosses are raking it in and

are doing nothing for their staff. The system is failing.”

Colleen, whose grandson is an apprentice at the shipyards, said, “My message for French protesters is, don’t give up. You are very brave, up against the military might of the government. Everyone in power is oppressing and abusing. Our young people are being prevented from going to universities—and knowledge is power. They are starving our young, old, vulnerable, disabled and sick.”

Paul is self-employed and said, “I would like to give solidarity to every worker in every walk of life, in any country. At the end of the day it is the governments just trying to rob them.”

Dan is from Romania and worked at the nearby Vauxhall auto plant, but was made redundant. Vauxhall workers walked out on strike to protests plans for hundreds of redundancies on the same day that the Cammell Laird workers struck. He said of the French protesters, “I am very sorry about the workers, we live the same thing, but in a different country. We are going to end up in the same situation.”

Sue supported the French protests as, “Everyone is going to be struggling. Look at the homelessness here, it shouldn’t be allowed.”

Gayle said, “Well I just think that no matter where you come from that everyone should stick together to keep their jobs. We’ve all got mouths to feed, whatever race you are and whatever colour you are.”

Outside Manchester Metropolitan University, students and university workers expressed their solidarity with French protesters.

Leon said, “I was never taken with [French president Emmanuel] Macron, an ex-banker. It’s good that the people of France took the fight into their own hands. We had 200,000 on the streets here against Brexit. If the

people can't hold the government to account, who can? I hope the youth of Paris are not too harshly treated.

"It's a shame that there is a rise of right-wing populism in France, Greece—it all stems from [former Labour Party Prime Minister Tony] Blair. I think the concept of an international socialist party, an army of socialists, would be beneficial to anyone trying to ignite protest."

Rukia, 20, a sociology student, expressed dismay at the police violence against the demonstrators. "How far are they willing to go to keep people quiet? The police have been very ruthless in handling the protests in France, which should be a legitimate expression of democracy. It is their right to protest as citizens.

"I heard that the protests were infiltrated by so-called extremists. However, it seems like more of a scapegoat to steer attention away from the initial cause of the protests. The wrong people are being overtaxed."

Rukia agreed with the policy of open borders advanced by the *World Socialist Web Site*, saying, "I went to Calais. It was enlightening being able to speak to refugees, but upsetting. What they are being put through to get somewhere safe!"

University caterer John told the WSWS why he thought people were taking to the streets in France. "Revolution is a development because people can't take any more. People are tired of the way the system has been running. They are challenging the minds of politicians who are very comfortable. Only a small percentage benefit and there is a growing divide between rich and poor.

"We call it democracy, but when you look at democracy in the west there are gaps. They are raising taxes [in France] but the people are not consulted. Things are changing very fast. There's going to be a police state in Europe."

Michael is a cleaner on the railways in Sheffield. He said, "I've seen on TV that the Yellow Vests and others are on strike. Macron is trying to privatise everything. He's not in favour of the workers. Ever since Macron came in, everybody protests because he is working for the rich class. He's not for those who are labouring, those who are poor.

"The working class, irrespective of skin colour or the gender, is the same. They need to fight for their rights. Their great grandparents fought for those rights and now Macron is coming to wipe everything. It's not fair. They should continue until they get what they want."

Tom works as a pensions' administrator for Capita, the large private business which has benefited from services in the National Health Service, local government and

education being privatised and outsourced. He said, "I am in support of the social grievances and demands of the protestors in France. I agree that Macron is the president of the rich. He is like another Tony Blair.

"I have read articles about the Yellow Vests, but you do not get an independent perspective on the police violence against the protesters. I think it is being whitewashed from the perspective of the ruling elites. You don't see what students or ordinary people are going through.

"Since the 2008 financial crash with the austerity measures being introduced everywhere, there has been rising social inequality, particularly throughout Europe."

On the rise of the far right internationally, he said, "I see this as a bellwether on the health of capitalism. This is happening across Europe and here in the UK. It is not working for ordinary people is it?"

In Bradford, WSWS reporters spoke to **Abdul**, who is originally from Kenya and works as a chef. "I think the protests are good. It's about fuel and the working-class must work to be able to live. I work in Leeds. I'm on £7.20 an hour. I can be spending £2 just to travel there on fuel. That means I can't live. That means I could be sleeping on the street.

"My cousin works in Belgium. The fuel's gone up there. It's affecting working class people. Protests are happening in France, Belgium, the Netherlands and it will happen here as well. The situation in Britain is not good."

He concluded, "A point before I go—I like socialism."

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