

German daily accuses Macron of surrender to “yellow mob”

By Peter Schwarz
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The German business press reacts indignantly to French President Emmanuel Macron’s attempt to appease the “Yellow Vest” protest movement with social concessions. Although the measures announced by Macron in a television speech on Monday evening are negligible and do nothing to eliminate the social inequality against which the protests are directed, the media accuse him of surrendering to the “mob” and thus jeopardising the stability of the Euro and the European Union.

“The reaction of the French president to the yellow mob must sound the alarm bells in Berlin: Emmanuel Macron is not a partner in rescuing the Euro and Europe, but a risk factor,” comments Olaf Gersemann in the daily *Die Welt*.

The editor for Economy, Finance and Real Estate can hardly control his anger. Instead of “ensuring that the minimum wage increases only moderately or preferably not at all”, Emmanuel Macron lays down his arms, he fumes. For weeks “the yellow jackets raged in France”. But instead of “opposing the excesses” and “going on the offensive”, Macron has missed the opportunity and legitimized the riots ex post facto by “crawling in front of the mob that is burning small cars”.

The hope has always been, Gersemann continues, “that Macron will become France’s Gerhard Schröder: a man who, if need be, would also put his office at risk in order to do the right thing in terms of economic policy”. (German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, a Social Democrat, lost his office prematurely in 2005 after pushing through his anti-social Agenda 2010 against bitter resistance.) But now France is threatening to “stumble behind Italy on its way to third class”.

For Germany this is “bad news”, both economically and politically, *Die Welt* complains. As long as Paris is

on Berlin’s side, the transformation of the monetary union into a transfer union can be prevented. If, on the other hand, Paris takes the side of Italy and Spain, then the construct tips over. That’s why Berlin must now address the question of what to do “if Germany does not have to deal with one Italy only in the monetary union and the EU, but with two.”

The former editor of the *Handelsblatt*, Gabor Steingart, argues in a similar fashion. In his *morning briefing*, he charges that Macron’s “generosity” is costing 10 billion euros a year, a bill that would “sooner or later be sent to the ECB ... In Frankfurt, Mario Draghi should start up the money press: Vive le déficit!”

Behind these comments lies the language of dictatorship.

The protest of the “Yellow Vests”, ignited by a fuel tax increase, has quickly developed into a broad mass movement against social inequality supported by the vast majority of the French population. After decades of social cuts and redistribution of income and wealth to the top, it has become the expression of anger within the working class and broad sections of the population who can no longer make ends meet at the end of the month, while a small minority lives in luxury.

The former investment banker Emmanuel Macron embodies this financial aristocracy. The ruthlessness with which he reduces social benefits is only surpassed by his personal arrogance. From the very beginning, his government cracked down brutally on the protests. Last weekend alone, almost 90,000 heavily armed police were deployed, attacking large crowds of demonstrators without warning with tear gas grenades and water cannon. 1,723 participants were arrested according to the official count.

Only when the movement could not be intimidated by

brutal violence did Macron decide to tactically retreat. His promises are a transparent attempt to gain time to paralyze the movement, divide it, further arm the police and close ranks with the other parties and the trade unions, all shocked by the mass protests.

When the German business press nevertheless accuses Macron of capitulation, it does so not only out of concern for the stability of the euro, from which German capital benefits like no other and which it uses to dictate its austerity policy to the whole of Europe. It does so primarily out of fear that the protests in France will spread to Germany.

The social contradictions against which the Yellow Vests rebel exist in a similar form in every country of the world—including Germany. Stagnating wages, rising profits and the consequences of Agenda 2010 have made Germany the most unequal country in Europe. It is boiling under the surface. Low wages, growing stress and unacceptable conditions make working in many areas—hospitals, postal service, retail, etc.—unbearable. Just this Monday, a massive strike largely shut down the German Railways for hours. At Bayer, Ford, Opel, VW and many other large companies, hundreds of thousands of jobs are at risk.

At the same time, the ruling class is reacting to the crisis of the European Union and to the trade conflicts with the US with great power politics and militarism. The political scientist Herfried Münkler had already called three years ago for Germany to become the sole European superpower. “‘Paymaster’ can only be in the long run who is willing to play the difficult role of a ‘taskmaster’”, he wrote in his book “Power in the Center”. This is now a consensus among the ruling elites.

Great power politics, militarism and redistribution in favour of the rich are not compatible with democracy. The commentary of *Die Welt* expresses this openly. It demands that a president or chancellor not bow to the democratic will of the majority, but that he oppose the majority and, if necessary, put his office at risk “in order to do the right thing in terms of economic policy”. What is “the right thing in terms of economic policy” is determined by the representatives of the banks; it is decided by the stock market and not by the needs of society.

How far preparations for a dictatorship have already progressed can be seen in the new totalitarian police

laws, the expansion of a comprehensive surveillance apparatus, the close links between the secret service and far-right extremists, and the courtship of the AfD by the media and all the other parties in parliament. Although the far-right party received only 12.6 percent of the vote, it now sets the tone for the government’s refugee policy and in many other areas.

The protests in France have confirmed that a struggle against the government of the rich can only be waged outside and independently of the trade unions and the nominally “left” parties, which work closely with the state and government and defend capitalism against any threat from below.

To lead this struggle to success requires a socialist program. The working class must not allow itself to be split and must unite internationally. It must build its own independent organs, action committees, to organize the struggle. It must fight for a workers’ governments and a United Socialist States of Europe to expropriate the assets of the financial aristocracy and place the economy under the democratic control of working people.

This is the program of the Socialist Equality Party and the other sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI). We encourage WSWS readers to contact us, discuss the program, and participate in building the SGP.

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