

Parti de l'égalité socialiste holds Paris meeting on “yellow vest” protests

By our reporter
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On Sunday, the *Parti de l'égalité socialiste* (PES) held a public meeting in Paris on the ongoing “yellow vest” protests in France. Titled “What revolutionary perspective for the yellow vests,” the meeting featured speakers from the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) of Britain, the *Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei* (SGP) of Germany and the PES itself. It was rebroadcast live to Berlin and Montreal.

Several dozen people attended the meeting, including several “yellow vest” protesters as well as members of the Tamil community in Paris. There was a lively discussion, with questions and contributions from the floor following each speaker’s remarks.

Alex Lantier spoke for the PES and reviewed the yellow vest protests. In just a few weeks, a protest against French President Emmanuel Macron’s regressive fuel taxes grew into a movement of the working class against social inequality and the existing order, and for Macron’s ouster. Lantier explained that the yellow vest protests are part of an international upsurge of the class struggle, in which workers are entering into struggle independently of and against the entire political establishment, including the national trade union bureaucracies.

He stressed that this confirmed the International Committee of the Fourth International’s insistence that the Stalinist bureaucracy’s dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 did not spell the “end of history” and the demise of the struggle for socialism. Rather, the period when workers’ struggles were held in check by middle-class “left” parties was ending.

Lantier reviewed how the yellow vest protest erupted outside of the unions and the political establishment as it has existed in the last half-century since the May 1968 general strike. These organizations were either indifferent or openly hostile to the protests.

He highlighted the PES’s call for the formation of committees of action in the working class, as a way for workers to organize themselves for struggle on an international basis, independently of the outmoded and hostile national union bureaucracies. In the context of such struggles and the building of such organizations, the PES and the other European sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) would intervene to explain the necessity of transferring power to the working class.

Christoph Vandreier, the assistant national secretary of the SGP and author of the book *Why are they back again?* on the return of German fascism, spoke next. Bringing greetings from the SGP, whose list he is heading in next year’s European elections, Vandreier said workers in Germany and beyond were following the yellow vest protests with sympathy and solidarity, amid growing opposition among German workers to wage cuts and plant closures.

Vandreier reviewed the SGP’s campaign to oppose the legitimization of German militarism and ensuing attempts by right-wing extremists in German academia to whitewash the crimes of Nazism. He explained how German imperialism’s attempt to overcome popular opposition to war and fascism led it to try to rehabilitate Hitlerism—a process now unfolding in every European country, notably with Macron’s favorable references to French fascist dictator Philippe Pétain.

As with the yellow vest protest, while the government’s policy was wildly unpopular, the SGP was the only political party that sought to rally the vast, untapped opposition among workers and youth and arm it with a socialist and anti-war program. Vandreier also explained the powerful support that the SGP’s campaign has elicited among concerned students at university campuses across Germany.

Finally, Chris Marsden, the national secretary of the SEP of Britain, spoke to underscore that the eruption of the yellow vest protests after a decade of deep capitalist crisis and war confirmed the fundamental conceptions of Leon Trotsky on the nature of capitalism and the capitalist crisis. As he wrote in the *Transitional Program* for the founding of the Fourth International 80 years ago in Paris, capitalism is in mortal crisis. The decisive question is that of revolutionary leadership in the international working class.

Marsden noted that for many yellow vest protesters, the term socialist might initially conjure up images of cynical careerists like President François Hollande of the Socialist Party. However, as they enter into struggle against the French and international financial aristocracy, the workers will be compelled to expropriate the wealth of the super-rich and build a workers' state pursuing socialist policies.

Outlining the history of Trotskyism, Marsden stressed that it was based on its struggle against Stalinism, Pabloism and middle-class radicalism that the ICFI approached the working class and fought to rally it to a struggle for socialism. The ICFI's history, he explained, was the demonstration that the record of social democracy, Stalinism and petty-bourgeois pseudo-left politics could not be attributed to Marxism, but rather to their hostility towards Marxism, socialism and the working class. The task now was to build the ICFI as the genuine Marxist vanguard in the working class.

Speakers took questions on the role committees of action could play in workers' struggles, the attitude of workers in Germany towards the shift of official politics towards the far-right, and the development and political character of the yellow vest movement.

Audience members stayed after the formal end of the meeting to discuss political issues and buy literature from the PES.

One person attending the meeting, Andréa, said that while she lived in the Paris area and was not initially as concerned with fuel taxes because of the availability of mass transit, she still considered herself a "yellow vest." She explained: "I'm of the same class, I have the same problems they do. I want a profound change for the working class. We must live and work in a better way. We are the ones who work and create the wealth, but we live on nothing."

She said that the PES meeting was unique in that it tried to give a political and historical explanation of where the yellow vest protest movement came from and what it represented. She said: "It was a very constructive meeting, it allowed you to understand the movement and foresee what can happen later on. The yellow vests need more solid organization. We do not want this to be another protest that is carried out in a just cause, but then ultimately is doomed by an absence of organization and political will."

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