

# Revolution Returns to Europe. How and Why

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*"Your heart  
is too small to hold  
this many people"  
— lyrics to a song of the Yellow Vests addressed to  
Macron*

*"I am not a seed of Chance  
I, the moulder of the new life  
I am a child of Need  
and a mature child of Wrath...  
...Listen to the voice of the winds  
For thousands of years!  
Inside my word  
all humanity hurts..."  
Kostas Varnalis (1884-1974), *The Guide* (Ο  
Οδηγητής) (\*)*

On the evening of 14 July 1789, the Duke de La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt woke King Louis XVI to inform him about the storming of the Bastille.

"Why, is this a rebellion?" the King wondered.

"No Sir. It's a revolution", replied the Duke.

What is happening today in France is one of the most significant political developments on the European continent after the collapse of the Soviet Union almost thirty years ago.

It is one of the most radical, deepest and dynamic challenges to modern European capitalism in decades, both in terms of method – the direct, mass mobilisation of people, of the "masses", their dramatic entry on to the stage of history – as well as in terms of the depth of the movement, as in its demands, which directly question the political and, implicitly but clearly, the social regime(\*\*). In particular, it is evenly spread throughout France, rather than being restricted to the capital.

If we wanted to find a revolutionary movement in Europe reassembling that of the Yellow Vests in terms of massiveness and depth we would probably have to look back to the period 1965-75 or, as a maximum, to 1985.

That is, we would look back to the general revolutionary strikes in France and Italy (1968-1969), the 'Prague Spring' (1968), the Carnation Revolution in Portugal (1974-1975), the Solidarity revolution in Poland (1979-1981) and, perhaps to a lesser extent, to the long,

militant strike of British miners (1984-85).

These are all movements which, each one in its own way and despite the differences between them, have profoundly changed how we perceive the world. All were characterised by the same direct form of action, with millions of simple people directly participating, and by the fact that they all questioned the foundations of economic and social organisation and the power system in the countries in which they broke out. All these movements, without exception, were, in one way or another, accompanied by demands for the democratisation of society, self-management and direct participation of people.

The momentum of these movements was later halted by the capitulation of Mitterrand's Socialists, the triumphs of Neo-liberalism in capitalist Europe (the Thatcher-Reagan-Friedman factor), the collapse of the Soviet regime and the "counter-revolutions" in Eastern Europe: "counter-revolutions" which, although advanced through "democratic" slogans, did not lead anywhere, but merely to the economic and political power changing hands from "socialist bureaucracies" to quite authoritarian, oligarchic and sometimes clearly Mafiosi elites, masquerading as democratic governments - "social Darwinists" in the service of International Capital and the US.

The Yellow Vests now seem to be picking up in their own way from where the European movements of 1965-85 left off their core fundamental demands, and they are doing so in their attempt to respond to a policy of systematic destruction of French society and, even more so, of its lower and poorer strata.

They are doing it within the context of today's European and global conditions, which differ substantially from those of that period, both in "subjective" and "objective" terms.

French and European crises and global economic crisis

The French revolution - the term 'revolution', we think, being more appropriate, because what is happening in France does not constitute simply a rebellion, as we will attempt to show later - is the direct product of the multifaceted, complex "European" crisis; a crisis which, in its turn, is the product and consequence of two factors: the deep economic crisis into which world capitalism entered in 2008, and the very way in which the European Union has been built and operates.

It is important to properly diagnose the root cause of the crisis, and the factors which provoked it, the global and the European one. Because if we assume that the whole problem is due to the Euro and the EU, ignoring the structural crisis of modern world capitalism, then we would come to the conclusion that all a country needs to do is to leave the EU, thereby solving all the problems. Of course, this does not mean that a given country should not attempt to leave the EU, if this is what is required for saving itself. But it means, however, that it must be aware that even by leaving, it will still be confronted by all the problems thrown up by the tremendous power that globalised capitalism and international finance have acquired.

Most criticisms of the EU, from various side, are correct. But this is not the main strategic problem. The main question is what is to be the European order of tomorrow and how to ensure that the order which shall be established after the EU will be better and not worse; what is the policy and strategy that, as of now, within the context of the existing EU, can serve better the purpose of creating a radically different and radically better European order

tomorrow.

This is because a European country, in particular a medium-sized country such as France, may initiate a course of liberation from the bonds of globalised capitalism. But it will not be easy for any country, even the strongest in Europe, to achieve this on its own in the long-term.

The international impact of the French revolutionary movement will be of crucial, vital significance, not only in the long-term, but also in short run, for both the movement itself and for the situation in all of Europe.

Any victory or defeat of the Yellow Vests movement depends heavily on its ability to expand and find immediate support in the rest of Europe.

On the other hand, the entire European situation will be directly and decisively affected by what will happen in the coming weeks and months in France.

However, we have not yet seen any of the forces which wish to self-identify as “radical leftist” in Europe -from the left-wing of Die Linke to the left-wing of the Labour Party- realising fully the significance of what is happening in France; adjusting their activity accordingly, giving absolute priority to the organisation of support to the French people, explaining to their people what is happening in France or even imitating the French movement through the initiation of campaigns in their countries, appropriate and adapted of course to the respective conditions they are facing in every country. We have not seen them attempting to create programmatically, politically and organisationally a united European front, not only of the radical left but also of all the forces that would be willing to commit sincerely to fighting the totalitarian dictatorship of financial capital in Europe.

What we mostly see are various groups, parties, and aspiring leaders, the usual strangers to modesty, narcissist stars of “international radicalism and progress”, prominent “intellectuals of the Self-evident”, who, at a moment when one of the most significant revolutions in Europe in the last fifty years is unfolding, are making micro-political electoral calculations in view of the European elections; calculations which too shall prove to be irrelevant within the context of a Europe that continues to be shaken to its very foundations by its crisis.

A direct result itself of the 2008 global economic crisis, the European crisis has so far generated, before the current developments in France, the destruction and “betrayed revolt” of Greece, the Indignados and the Podemos in Spain, the left government in Portugal, the BREXIT vote, the surge of the radical right in Italy, the rise of AfD in Germany, the “clinical death” of the German Social Democratic and the French Socialist Party, the rise of Le Pen and Mélenchon in France.

However, the developments in France are now taking us to another level, because of two factors of fundamental significance. The French people, having spent a number of decades hoping in vain for some improvement through the processes of elections and referenda, has now moved to the phase of direct, dynamic and mass mobilisation of the people. Secondly, the French movement is for the first time directly questioning the political and, indirectly but clearly, the social regime.

The financial oligarchy which is currently governing Europe together with its employees – the European politicians and bureaucrats – has no answer to the issues raised by the

Greeks, Spanish, British, Italians and, even more so, by the French now.

For this and for other reasons that we will explain, the French crisis is only the beginning of a course of events, which, of course, we cannot predict and prescribe; nor can we foresee where it will lead; however, we can say with certainty already from now that they will radically change Europe and the world.

The developments in France not only coincide with and partly reflect the continuing deep crisis of the EU, a crisis threatening its very existence. The developments are taking place, most probably, on the eve of a new exacerbation of the economic crisis of 2008, against which states now have much fewer means to use for defending themselves than in 2008.

And as if all this were not enough, at the international level we also note a rapid deterioration of all the significant global concerns, including the re-emergence of the risk of nuclear war and, most importantly, the near certainty over the end of human life through climatic change and environmental destruction; such defining issues require immediate radical measures that go far beyond the limitations and capabilities of the existing economic, social and international system.

### Realism and Romanticism

The other day a friend, albeit in a well-meant and tactful way, accused me of a sort of “revolutionary romanticism”, referring to [my most recent article about the developments in France](#). I will leave aside the fact that, as it soon transpired from our conversation, he was not aware of the most elementary information such as what are the main demands of the Yellow Vest movement; instead he perceived as real not what is really happening in France – of course for this the media is more to blame for not giving out all the information – but what he himself thought is likely to be happening!

Living in Greece he thought that in France, too, politicians could throw some “revolutionary buzzwords” just to gather votes, as it so often is the case with Greek politicians. So he was trying to interpret the French movement from the point of view of our current moral and intellectual misery, which is the result of our overwhelming defeat of 2015 and the way it has come about. It may also be that deep inside, he could find difficult, and even be annoyed by the comparison between the current grandeur of a revolting people with our own, now humiliated and defeated, miserable and servile, individual, social and national existence.

However, the important point is something different, and I told him so. Romanticism is not to hope for the advancement of humans and people at the forefront of the historical process. They did it in the past and hence they can do it again in the future. Romanticism, even a potentially deadly illusion, is to bestow upon those who today govern the world, the ability to prevent the destruction of humanity!

Realistically speaking, the only chance that humanity has to save itself is to consciously take its own action to this effect and, indeed, to do so very quickly.

The May 1968 slogan “Imagination to the Power” is today the only viable realism. The “revolution”, in the meaning of a radical transformation of the dominant system, regardless of the way in which it may happen, is a precondition for the survival of humanity. This sort of thing is no longer taught by social and philosophical theories or by our morality; it is rather

determined by the merciless clarity and accuracy of the mathematical and physics equations of climate science.

Besides, great revolutions often happen when no one expects them. And no one expects them, because when they happen a system is “completed”; it is, in a way, “closed”, having left no room for any “reform” or “self-correction”. The same factor that makes Revolutions seem impossible and even inconceivable is rendering them also unavoidable!

The global human consciousness owns this knowledge, despite the constant efforts of the dominant and possessors to erase it. This is the reason why we honour the memory of those who were “defeated” in history, of those who “lost”, such as Jesus Christ and Spartacus, and we pay no tribute to those who crucified them to protect and preserve the public order and the power of their time.

It is precisely at this moment, when the system has “closed”, does not allow any progress and is threatening with destruction, that the god of Necessity unearths from the depths of the souls of ordinary people, from the soul of the great “anonymous” crowd, the moral superior human qualities, namely the drive towards freedom and dignity, the expression of the mortal being’s need for meaning in his life. It is then, at those privileged moments of history, that simple people, free from the usual burdens and hypocrisies of professional politicians and intellectuals, employ the superior brain functions of humans, reason and the imagination, in order to find solutions to the problems they encounter, as the French have been doing for nearly two months now.

All revolutions may look similar to each other, but each one is different. This one, the revolution that is now struggling to force its way out of its mother’s belly – the European crisis- has an incomparable advantage over the Great French Revolution of 1789 and over the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917. The people who revolted now have significantly higher intellectual weapons, more knowledge to rely upon than what was available to the sans-culottes and the Russian workers of the past revolutions. Moreover, they have the experience of the achievements, but also of the degeneration and tragedies that accompanied all the great revolutionary movements of history.

But it is impossible to cover such a subject in one article. In our next article, we will examine the way the French people were led to take the course they have, and the structure of their demands, at the centre of which is the question of popular sovereignty, the possibility of the people to exercise power or, at least, to be able to control in an effective way how state power is exercised.

The same fundamental question remains, albeit in a new form, presented, but not solved in a satisfactory way, by the Great French Revolution of 1789, the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917 and many other popular uprisings in Europe and the world.

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## Notes

(\*) This is an improvised translation by the author of a portion of a poem by Kostas Varnalis (1984-1974), one of the greatest poets and writers of modern Greece. A communist, a Marxist and a

member of the resistance during the Nazi occupation of Greece, he was persecuted for his ideas.

(\*\*) It is quite difficult to write an article about France addressed to people who are not living in France. The reason lies with the fact that Western Media do all that they can, indeed with a certain degree of success, in order to play down, distort and conceal the events in France and, most importantly, their significance. Their aim is to present them as some sort of the usual “social upheavals”, without highlighting the underlying causes which have driven the people of one of the most important countries in Europe to revolt against the political system in power.

During the military dictatorship in Greece, I was a schoolboy. I remember that the press at that time was full of propaganda, but, at the same time, it was publishing all the basic facts necessary to form an opinion. Through this censored press, controlled by the “black colonels”, Greeks nevertheless knew better what was happening in France during the May '68 Revolution or with the Vietnam War, than they know now about social and political problems in other EU countries or about the reality of a dozen wars in the Middle East!

The “Empire of Finance” which controls the media and most “intellectuals”, the “Space of Ideas” in our societies, in a way that is unprecedented in the history of capitalism, has a vital interest in doing so, as it trembles at the prospect of the “French virus” spreading outside France, as happened in 1789, 1848 and 1968.

Besides, even if they wanted to transmit the real meaning of these processes, they wouldn't be able to do it. Journalism follows democracy on the path to demise. In their efforts to control all information, they have isolated almost all journalists with the knowledge and critical thinking skills that are required to analyse and describe the meaning of a revolution such, as the one that now seems to be unfolding in France. Nowadays, it is often the case that the media do not even choose journalists of their own liking, asking instead political parties and financial lobbies to “accolade” these and appoint “journalists”.

The suffocating and total control of the sphere of ideas have led to the creation of a class of “political professionals”, intellectuals, scientists, advertisers and pollsters who have ended up believing their own propaganda and are now unable, to a large extent, to analyse what is happening in the real world, even if this is needed by the class of interests they serve. George Orwell has been proven right.

Perhaps this is why the French *Le Monde* decided to send 70 scientists across France on a quest to understand what's going on in the country – probably the largest “press expedition” in history!

*Featured image: Fuel tax protestors in France (Source: WSWS)*

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