

Why France's Yellow Vest Protests Have Been Ignored by "The Resistance" in the U.S.

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"The rich are only defeated when running for their lives." — C.L.R. James, The Black Jacobins

In less than two months, the yellow vests ("gilets jaunes") movement in France has reshaped the political landscape in Europe. For a seventh straight week, demonstrations continued across the country even after concessions from a cowering President Emmanuel Macron while inspiring a wave of similar gatherings in neighboring states like Belgium and the Netherlands. Just as el-Sisi's dictatorship [banned](#) the sale of high-visibility vests to prevent copycat rallies in Egypt, corporate media has predictably worked overtime trying to demonize the spontaneous and mostly leaderless working class movement in the hopes it will not spread elsewhere.

The media oligopoly initially attempted to ignore the insurrection altogether, but when forced to reckon with the yellow vests they maligned the incendiary marchers using horseshoe theory to suggest a confluence between far left and far right supporters of Jean-Luc Mélenchon and Marine Le Pen. To the surprise of no one, mainstream pundits have also stoked fears of 'Russian interference' behind the unrest. We can assume that if the safety vests were ready-made off the assembly line of NGOs like the raised fist flags of Serbia's OTPOR! movement, the pressites would be telling a different story.

It turned out that a crisis was not averted but merely postponed when Macron defeated his demagogue opponent Le Pen in the 2017 French election. While it is true that the gilets jaunes were partly impelled by an increase on fuel prices, contrary to the prevailing narrative [their official demands](#) are not limited to a carbon tax. They also consist of explicit ultimatums to increase the minimum wage, improve the standard of living, and an end to austerity, among other legitimate grievances. Since taking office, Macron has declared war on trade unions while pushing through enormous tax breaks for the wealthy ([like himself](#))—it was just a matter of time until the French people had enough of the country's privatization. It is only a shock to the oblivious establishment why the former Rothschild banker-turned-politician, who addressed the nation seated at a gold desk while Paris was ablaze, is suddenly in jeopardy of losing power. The status quo's incognizance is reminiscent of Marie Antoinette who during the 18th century when told the peasants had no bread famously replied, "let them eat cake" as the masses starved under her husband Louis XIV.

While the media's conspicuous blackout of coverage is partly to blame, the deafening silence from across the Atlantic in the United States is really because of the lack of class consciousness on its political left. With the exception of Occupy Wall Street, the American left has been so preoccupied with an endless race to the bottom in the two party 'culture wars' it is unable to comprehend an upheaval undivided by the contaminants of identity

politics. A political opposition that isn't fractured on social issues is simply unimaginable. Not to say the masses in France are exempt from the internal contradictions of the working class, but the fetishization of lifestyle politics in the U.S. has truly become its weakness. We will have to wait and see whether the yellow vests transform into a global movement or arrive in America, but for now the seeming lack of solidarity stateside equates to a complicity with Macron's agenda.

It serves as a reminder of the historically revisionist understanding of French politics in the U.S. that is long-established. The middle class dominated left-wing in America ascribes to a historical reinterpretation of the French Revolution that is a large contributor of its aversion to transformative praxis in favor of incrementalism. The late Italian Marxist philosopher and historian Domenico Losurdo, who died in June of this year, offered the most thorough understanding of its misreading of history in seminal works such as *War and Revolution: Rethinking the Twentieth Century*. The liberal rereading of the French Revolution is the ideological basis for its rejection of the revolutionary tradition from the Jacobins to the Bolsheviks that has neutralized the modern left to this day.

According to its revised history, the inevitable outcome of comprehensive systemic change is Robespierre's so-called 'Reign of Terror', or the 'purges' of the Stalin era in the Soviet Union. In its view, what began with the Locke and Montesquieu-influenced reforms of the constitutional monarchy was 'hijacked' by the radical Jacobin and sans-culotte factions. Losurdo explains that counter-revolutionaries eager to discredit the image of rebellion overemphasize its violence and bloodshed, and never properly contextualize it as self-defense against the real reign of terror by the ruling class. The idea behind this recasting of history is to conflate revolutionary politics with Nazi Germany whose racially-motivated genocide was truly the inheritor of the legacy of European colonialism, not the ancestry of the Jacobins or the Russian Revolution.



Maximilien Robespierre's real crime in the eyes of bourgeois historians was attempting to fulfill the egalitarian ideals of republicanism by transferring political power from the aristocracy and nouveaux riche directly into the hands of the working class, just as the Paris Commune did nearly 80 years later. It is for this reason he subsequently became one of the most misunderstood and unfairly maligned figures in world history, perhaps one day to be absolved. The U.S. reaction to the yellow vests is a continuation of the denial and suppression of the class conflict inherent in the French Revolution which continues to seethe beneath the surfaces of capitalism today.

In today's political climate, it is easy to forget that there have been periods where the American left was actually engaged with the crisis of global capitalism. In what seems like aeons ago, the anti-globalization movement in the wake of NAFTA culminated in huge

protests in Seattle in 1999 which saw nearly 50,000 march against the World Trade Organization. Following the 2008 financial collapse, it briefly reemerged in the Occupy movement which was also swiftly put down by corporate-state repression. Currently, the political space once inhabited by the anti-globalization left has been supplanted by the 'anti-globalist' rhetoric mostly associated with right-wing populism.

Globalism and globalization may have qualitatively different meanings, but they nevertheless are interrelated. Although it is shortsighted, there are core accuracies in the former's narrative that should be acknowledged. The idea of a shadowy world government isn't exclusively adhered to by anti-establishment conservatives and it is right to suspect there is a worldwide cabal of secretive billionaire power brokers controlling events behind the scenes. There is indeed a 'new world order' with zero regard for the sovereignty of nation states, just as there is a 'deep state.' However, it is a ruling class not of paranoid imagination but real life, and a right-wing billionaire like Robert Mercer is as much a globalist as George Soros.

Ever since capitalism emerged it has always been global. The current economic crisis is its latest cyclical downturn, impoverishing and alienating working people whose increasing hardship is what has led to the trending rejection of the EU. Imperialism has exported capital leading to the destruction of jobs in the home sectors of Western nations while outsourcing them to the third world. Over time, deep disgruntlement among the working class has grown toward an economic system that is clearly rigged against them, where the skewed distribution of capital gains and widespread tax evasion on the part of big business is camouflaged as buoyant economic growth. When it came crashing down in the last recession, the financial institutions responsible were bailed out using tax payer money instead of facing any consequences. Such grotesque unfairness has only been amplified by the austerity further transferring the burden from the 1% to the poor.

Before the gilets jaunes, the U.K.'s Brexit referendum in 2016 laid bare these deep class divisions within the European Union. One of the most significant events in the continent since WWII, it has ultimately threatened to reshape the Occident's status in the post-war order as a whole. Brexit manifested out of divisions within Britain's political parties, especially the Torys, which had been plagued for years by internal dispute over the EU. Those in power were blind to the warning signs of discontent toward a world economy in crisis and were shocked by the plebiscite in which the working class defied the powers that be against all odds with more than half voting to leave.

In general, well-to-do Brits were hard remainers while those suffering most severely from the destruction of industry, unemployment and austerity overwhelmingly chose to leave in what was described as a "peasants revolt" by the media. The value of the pound sterling quickly plunged and not long after the status of the United Kingdom as a whole came into question as Britain found itself at odds with Scotland's unanimous decision to remain. Brexit tugged at the bonds holding the EU together and suddenly the collective standing clout of its member states is at stake in a potential breakup of the entire bloc.

Euroscepticism is also by no means a distinctly British phenomenon, as distrust has soared in countries hit the hardest by neoliberalism like Greece (80%), with Spain and France not far behind. In fact, before there was Brexit there was fear among the elite of a 'Grexit.' In response to its unprecedented debt crisis manufactured by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Greek people elected the Coalition of the Radical Left, SYRIZA, to a majority of legislative seats to the Hellenic Parliament during its 2015 bailout referendum.

Unfortunately, the synthetic alliance turned out to be anything but radical and a trojan horse of the establishment. SYRIZA was elected on its promise to rescind the terms of Greek membership in the EU, but shortly after taking office it betrayed its constituency and agreed to the troika's mass privatization. Even its former finance minister Yanis Varoufakis admitted that SYRIZA was a controlled opposition and auxiliary [of the Soros Foundation](#).

Apart from suffering collective amnesia regarding the EU's neoliberal policies, apparently the modern left is also in serious need of a history lesson regarding the EU federation's fascist origins. It has been truly puzzling to see self-proclaimed progressives mourning Britain's decision to withdraw from a continental union that was historically masterminded by former fifth columnists of Nazi Germany. It was in the aftermath of WWII's devastation that the 1951 Treaty of Paris established the nucleus of the EU in the European Coal and Steel Community, a cooperative union formed by France, Italy, West Germany, and the three Benelux states (Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands). The Europe Declaration charter stated:

“By the signature of this Treaty, the involved parties give proof of their determination to create the first supranational institution and that thus they are laying the true foundation of an organized Europe. This Europe remains open to all European countries that have freedom of choice. We profoundly hope that other countries will join us in our common endeavor.”

The idea of forming a “supranational” union was conceived by the French statesman Robert Schuman, who during the outbreak of WWII served as the Under-Secretary of State for Refugees in the Reynaud government. When Nazi Germany invaded France in 1940, Schuman by all accounts willingly voted to grant absolute dictatorial powers to Marshall Philippe Pétain to become Head of State of the newly formed Vichy government, the puppet regime that ruled Nazi-occupied France until the Allied invasion in 1944. By doing so, he retained his position in parliament, though he later chose to resign. Following the war, like all Vichy collaborators Schuman was initially charged with the offense of *indignité nationale* (“national unworthiness”) and stripped of his civil rights as a traitor.

More than 4,000 alleged quislings were summarily executed following Operation Overlord and the Normandy landings, but the future EU designer was fortunate enough to have friends in high places. Schuman's clemency was granted by none other than General Charles de Gaulle himself, the leader of the resistance during the war and future French President. Instantly, Schuman's turncoat reputation was rehabilitated and his wartime activity whitewashed. Even though he had knowingly voted full authority to Pétain, the retention of his post in the Vichy government was veneered to have occurred somehow without his knowledge or consent.



Marshal Pétain meets with Adolf Hitler in 1940.

Schuman is officially regarded as one of the eleven men who were ‘founding fathers’ of what later became the EU. One of the other major figures that contributed to the federal integration of the continent was Konrad Adenauer, the first Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany. The Nuremberg Trials may have tried and executed most of the top leadership of the Nazi Party, but the post-war government that became West Germany was saturated with former Third Reich officials. Despite the purported post-war ‘denazification’ policy inscribed in the Potsdam agreement, many figures who had directly participated in the Holocaust were appointed to high positions in Adenauer’s administration and never prosecuted for their atrocities.

One such war criminal was the former Ministry of the Interior and drafter of the Nuremberg race statutes, [Hans Globke](#), who became Adenauer’s right hand man as his Secretary of State and Chief of Staff. Adenauer also successfully lobbied the Allies to free most of the Wehrmacht war criminals in their custody, winning the support of then U.S. General and future President Dwight Eisenhower. By 1951, motivated by the desire to quickly rearm and integrate West Germany into NATO in the new Cold War, the policy of denazification was prematurely ended and countless offenders were allowed to reenter branches of government, military and public service. Their crimes against humanity took a backseat to the greater imperialist priority of rearmament against East Germany and the Soviets.

In the years following WWII, there was also concern among the elite of anti-Americanism growing in Western Europe. The annual Bilderberg Group conference was established in 1954 by Prince Bernard of the Netherlands, himself a former Reiter-SS Corps and Nazi Party member, to promote ‘Atlanticism’ and facilitate cooperation between American and European leaders. Invitations to the Bilderberg club meetings were extended to only the most exclusive paragons in politics, academia, the media, industry, and finance. In 2009, WikiLeaks [revealed](#) that it was at the infamous assembly where the hidden agenda of the European Coal and Steel Community, later the EU, was set:

“E. European Unity: The discussion on this subject revealed general support for the idea of European integration and unification among the participants from

the six countries of the European Coal and Steel Community, and a recognition of the urgency of the problem. While members of the group held different views as to the method by which a common market could be set up, there was a general recognition of the dangers inherent in the present divided markets of Europe and the pressing need to bring the German people, together with the other peoples of Europe, into a common market. That the six countries of the Coal and Steel Community had definitely decided to establish a common market and that experts were now working this out was felt to be a most encouraging step forward and it was hoped that other countries would subsequently join it.”



Prince Bernhard presides over the first annual Bilderberg meeting in 1954.

At the 1955 conference, the rudimentary idea for a European currency or what became the Eurozone was even discussed, three years before the Treaty of Rome which established the European Economic Community, without the public’s knowledge:

“A European speaker expressed concern about the need to achieve a common currency, and indicated that in his view this necessarily implied the creation of a central political authority.”

The mysterious Bilderberg gatherings are still held to this day under notorious secrecy and are frequently the subject of wild speculation. One can imagine a topic behind the scenes at this year’s meeting would be how to address the growth of anti-EU ‘populism’ and uprisings like the gilet jaunes. Hitlerite expansionism had been carried out on the Führer’s vision for a European federation in the Third Reich—in many respects, the EU is a rebranded realization of his plans for empire-building. How ironic that liberals are clinging to a multinational political union founded by fascist colluders while the same economic bloc is being opposed by today’s far right after its new Islamophobic facelift.

While nationalism may have played an instrumental role in Brexit, there is a manufactured hysteria hatched by the establishment which successfully reduced the complex range of reasons for the Leave EU vote to racism and flag-waving. They are now repeating this pattern by overstating the presence of the far right among the yellow vests. Such delirium not only demonizes workers but coercively repositions the left into supporting something it otherwise shouldn’t—the EU and by default its laissez-faire policies—thereby driving the masses further into the arms of the same far right. Echoes of this can be seen in the U.S. with the vapid response to journalist Angela Nagle’s [recent article](#) about the immigration crisis on the southern border. The faux-left built a straw man in their attack on Nagle, who

dared to acknowledge that the establishment only really wants 'open borders' for an endless supply of low-wage labor from regions in the global south destabilized by U.S. militarism and trade liberalization. Aligning itself with the hollow, symbolic gestures of centrists has only deteriorated the standards of the left participating in such vacuousness and dragged down to the level of liberals.

There is no doubt Brexit and Trump pushed the xenophobia button and could not have come about without it. However, such criticism means nothing when it comes from moral posturers who claim to "stand with refugees" while supporting the very 'humanitarian' interventionist policies displacing them. Nativism was not the sole reason the majority voted to leave the EU and many working class minorities also [were Brexiters](#). Of course their fellow workers and migrants are not the true cause of their misery. After all, it was not just chattel slaves who came to the U.S. unwillingly but European immigrants fleeing continental wars and starvation as well—the crisis in the EU today is no different.

Fundamentally, migrants seek asylum on Europe's doorstep because of NATO's imperial expansion and the unexpected arrival of Brexit has threatened to weaken the EU's military arm. Already desperate to reinvent itself and a new enemy in Russia despite its functional obsolescence, the shock of the referendum has inconveniently undermined NATO's ability to pressure Moscow and Beijing, a step forward for mitigating world peace in the long run and a silver lining to its outcome. It is the task of the left to reject the EU's neoliberal project while transmitting the message that capital, not refugees, is the cause of the plight of the masses. It is also necessary to have faith in the people, something cynical liberals lack. Racism may historically be the achilles heel of the working class but underlying Brexit, the election of Trump, and the yellow vests is the spirit of defiance in working people, albeit one of political confusion in need of guidance.

If the yellow vests are today's sans-culottes, like those which became the revolutionary partisans in the French Revolution, they will eventually need a Jacobin Club. Relatively progressive but ultimately reformist figures like Mélenchon are no such spearhead and will only lead them down the same dead end of SYRIZA. The absence of any such vanguard has forced the working class to take matters into their own hands in the interim. If history is any guide, the gilets jaunes will be stamped out until a new cadre takes the reins whose objective is, as Lenin said, "*not to champion the degrading of the revolutionary to the level of an amateur, but to raise the amateurs to the level of revolutionaries.*" We also cannot fall into ideological fantasies that we live in permanent revolutionary circumstances or that a spontaneous uprising can become comprehensive simply because of ingenious leadership. Nevertheless, as Mao Tse-Tung wrote, "*a single spark can start a prairie fire*" and hopefully the yellow vests are that flame.

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