

The Yellow Vests Movement: Another Indicator of Disillusionment of the Masses

Macron has committed a series of errors provoking the wrath of the French people.

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The Yellow Vests (Gilets Jaunes) movement which originated online during late May 2018 in France, has now spread to other European regions, and even as far as the beleaguered Middle East nation of Iraq. The campaign, uniquely spurred by social media techniques and comprising hundreds of thousands, represents another symptom of the increasing persecution and isolation of mass populations.

The arrival of organizations, like those donning the Yellow Vests, is primarily due to neoliberal assaults imposed by governments on ordinary citizens, who as the years advance are left feeling irrelevant and despondent. At the same time, a tiny percentage – the top bracket in society – have become wealthier and more powerful than they ever imagined possible.

American institutions founded at the end of World War II, like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, have led the way in imposing destructive policies resulting in widespread plutocracies, along with rising global financial instability.

General populations are reduced to mere observers, only called upon to vote on election days and rescue those responsible when banking systems inevitably collapse.

It is sometimes forgotten, however, that the public possesses a great deal of power, with each nation's citizens having a breaking point, before they organize and take to the streets. France with its long history of civil strife contains particularly strong wide-scale activism, which for decades has put the fear of God into their country's leaders. One can be sure that president Emmanuel Macron, in charge since May 2017, has been experiencing restless nights of late.

In his short time at the helm, Macron has so far proven himself unsuited to such a challenging role, borne out by his record low approval ratings of under 30%. Countless leaders through the decades have sought office from an insatiable desire to simply attain power – for reasons of opportunism, personal gain, glorifying one's image, and so on. Such characters as these are often afflicted too with short-termism and myopia.

A leader who assumes control of state as an exercise in self-promotion and vanity, is almost certain to be cast on the scrapheap of history. Macron may well be another. His scarcity of experience allied to the blunders repeatedly committed now leave him in a vulnerable position, especially so in a powerful and demanding nation like France.

Macron's reputation as a "president for the rich" is not without foundation. He is himself a multi-millionaire with an extensive background in elite investment banking and financial departments. Macron has pursued numerous "reforms" – that is, policies favouring the wealthy classes – which are further harming the general population and working masses of France. Therein lies the rise of groups like the Yellow Vests movement.

Some of those protesting have also been victims (and descendants of victims) relating to murderous imperial policies and planning. Between 1954 and 1962, France and her mercenary forces killed at least a million Algerian citizens, during a seldom spoken of colonial war in north Africa.

To escape the atrocities, hundreds of thousands of Algerians also fled the country, a proportion of whom made their way to French soil. There, many were treated as virtual second class citizens, a reality which largely continues to the present day.

Though the Yellow Vests movement itself has no distinct leader, a prominent figure is Thierry Paul Valette, a writer, artist and activist. Valette [is thought](#) to be sympathetic to France Unbowed (La France Insoumise), a far left party founded by the experienced socialist politician, Jean-Luc Melenchon.



Jacline Mouraud, a 51-year-old musician and hypnotherapist, is credited with founding the Yellow Vests; she is now distancing herself from them, revealing its interchangeable nature. Mouraud also claims to have received death threats, after insisting the movement should seek dialogue with the French government.

A notable Yellow Vests figure is Eric Drouet, a 33-year-old truck driver and activist who expresses an ambition to one day assume control of France. Drouet also outlined a need to "move on the direction" of the French presidential palace, Macron's official residence. Priscillia Ludosky is another leading member of the movement, aged 33 too, a self-employed woman and noted spokesperson for the group.

As can be expected relating to any movement resembling a threat to institutions of power, the Yellow Vests are being widely suppressed and intimidated. Drouet is himself currently under investigation for instigating "unlawful protests". The Yellow Vests' foremost personalities have expressed their disregard for neoliberal, elitist policies which have exploited the vulnerable societies in France.

Other centres of authority, such as the mainstream press, have denigrated the Yellow Vests for having been [hijacked](#) by "radical" elements, "rabble-rousers" and "extremists". The movement in reality comprises people from a variety of backgrounds and age groups, with

little sign of outright links to any party, organization or trade union.

After all, France is a diverse nation comprising various ethnic groups and cultures. As often with great gatherings of protesters, there will be small numbers engaging in acts of vandalism and looting. Also common is a strong police presence – protectors of the state – who have come down heavily on the Yellow Vests, arresting many hundreds while sometimes using strong-armed methods, including tear gas and water cannon.

A driving force behind the protests has been Macron's steep increasing of fuel costs, in a proposed attempt to tackle carbon emissions. In doing so, millions of French motorists have been forced into paying excessive prices. Such policies as this constitute another error of misjudgment on Macron's part, penalizing the broader public rather than targeting specific areas. Macron has since been compelled to retreat on his strategies, an indication of the pressure he is under and influence of broad activism.

The French leader may instead have been wiser to implement programs so as to encourage electric car usage throughout the country. Out of 32 million automobiles registered in France, less than 100,000 are of the electric type.

Moreover, Macron has pursued crippling austerity measures, especially dangerous policies leading elsewhere to a rise in far-right groups across Europe, South America, etc., as the Left flounders. Macron has further sought tax cuts favouring the rich in a country having a high cost of living, low minimum wage, with almost 20% of its youth unemployed. Indeed, there are about two million without work in France.

Meanwhile, US president Donald Trump has capitalized on the Yellow Vest protests for his own political means, by laying blame for their rise on the 2015 Paris climate agreement, and also cynically praising the marchers. Trump has himself engineered especially harmful environmental policies, dating to almost the first day he entered office nearly two years ago. The American leader is surely gleeful at his French counterpart's struggles, whom he does not hold in the highest of esteem.

While Trump gloats, one can be sure European Union bosses are looking on with disapproving eyes. The EU, headquartered in the Belgian capital Brussels, has witnessed Yellow Vest remonstrations reaching that nation too. European Commission president, Jean-Claude Juncker, was last week expected to address the French National Assembly; yet his visit to Paris was cancelled due to marches, as was a separate meeting with Macron.

According to [recent polls](#), over 70% of France's populace are supportive of the Yellow Vest campaigners. This backing will only prove significant if the movement is sustained, leading to a further rise in numbers and momentum. The true challenge for protest organizations is to continue their activities long into the future, thereby achieving further goals and concessions.

This requires efforts of great dedication and struggle seldom witnessed, akin to scaling a tall mountain step-by-step. It is of little use to march for a period of weeks or months, later becoming discontented or bored, and laying down arms. Organized movements have previously suffered from disillusion and fallen by the wayside, when faced with seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

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