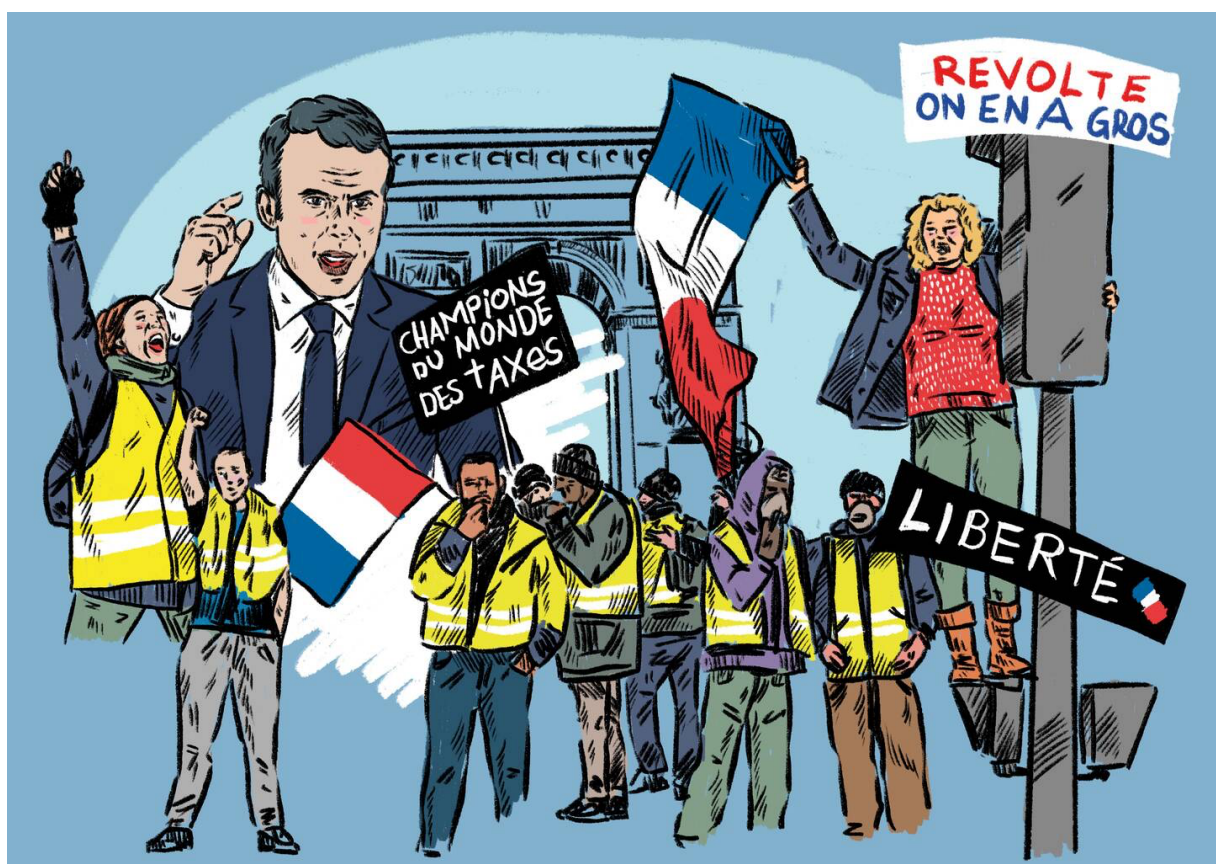


France: Trade Unions, Social Movements and the Yellow Vests

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With the neoliberal reforms that Macron has rapidly implemented, social dialogue between social movements, unions and the government has become more difficult and fragmented. The French trade union movement is split along political lines into several umbrella organizations, and the level of organization has stagnated. The yellow vests have not been able to decisively change Macron's course. But they have rearticulated positions critical of capitalism and class struggle, also taking migrant struggles into the equation.



The French Union Movement

The French trade union movement has been split into several confederations since the early beginnings of the labor movement. The more social-democratic and consensus-oriented federations are the French Democratic Trade Union Confederation (**CFDT**) and the General Confederation of Labor Power (**CGT-FO**). They accept deregulation if internal structures of worker participation are reinforced. The level of unionization has stagnated at just 11%.

- The CGT, formerly closely linked to the Communist Party, relies on mobilization in the streets. It has a class-struggle orientation and wants to work from the workplaces into society.

- The CFTD, which tends to organize employees, has replaced the CGT as the strongest union in workplace council elections since 2017. This is predominantly due to structural change (from production in large factories to service industries).

Macron's Reform Politics

Elected president in 2017 and 2022, Emmanuel Macron and his LREM (The Republic on the Move!) party reject the previously usual social dialogue and state-mediated concertation between business associations and unions.

Macron has all reform projects passed in the shortest possible time to quickly make changes that aren't easily altered.



In 2018, all sectors of society, but especially unions and students, protested Macron's reforms, such as billions in tax cuts for large French companies, over 100,000 job cuts in the public sector, the transfer of the state railroad SNCF to a private company, the tightening of asylum laws, and a reorganization of university admissions.

For weeks there were strikes at the SNCF, dozens of universities were occupied. On May 5 of 2018, more than 130,000 people demonstrated in Paris. However, the neoliberal reforms could not be stopped.



In November 2018, the Yellow Vests movement emerged unexpectedly. The trigger may have been the rejection of a tax that would have increased the price of diesel, but the demands of the yellow vests quickly went far beyond that. Unorganized right-wing actors had helped instigate the actions on social media, but concerns about the dismantling of state infrastructure, poverty pensions, and unfair taxation of large fortunes dominated among the yellow vests.

Solidarity With Migrant Suburbs

Racist tones did not play a role; rather, solidarity with the people of the migrant suburbs grew over time. There, the state and police have been countering protests against exclusion and poverty with violence for decades. The yellow vests saw themselves affected by this situation.

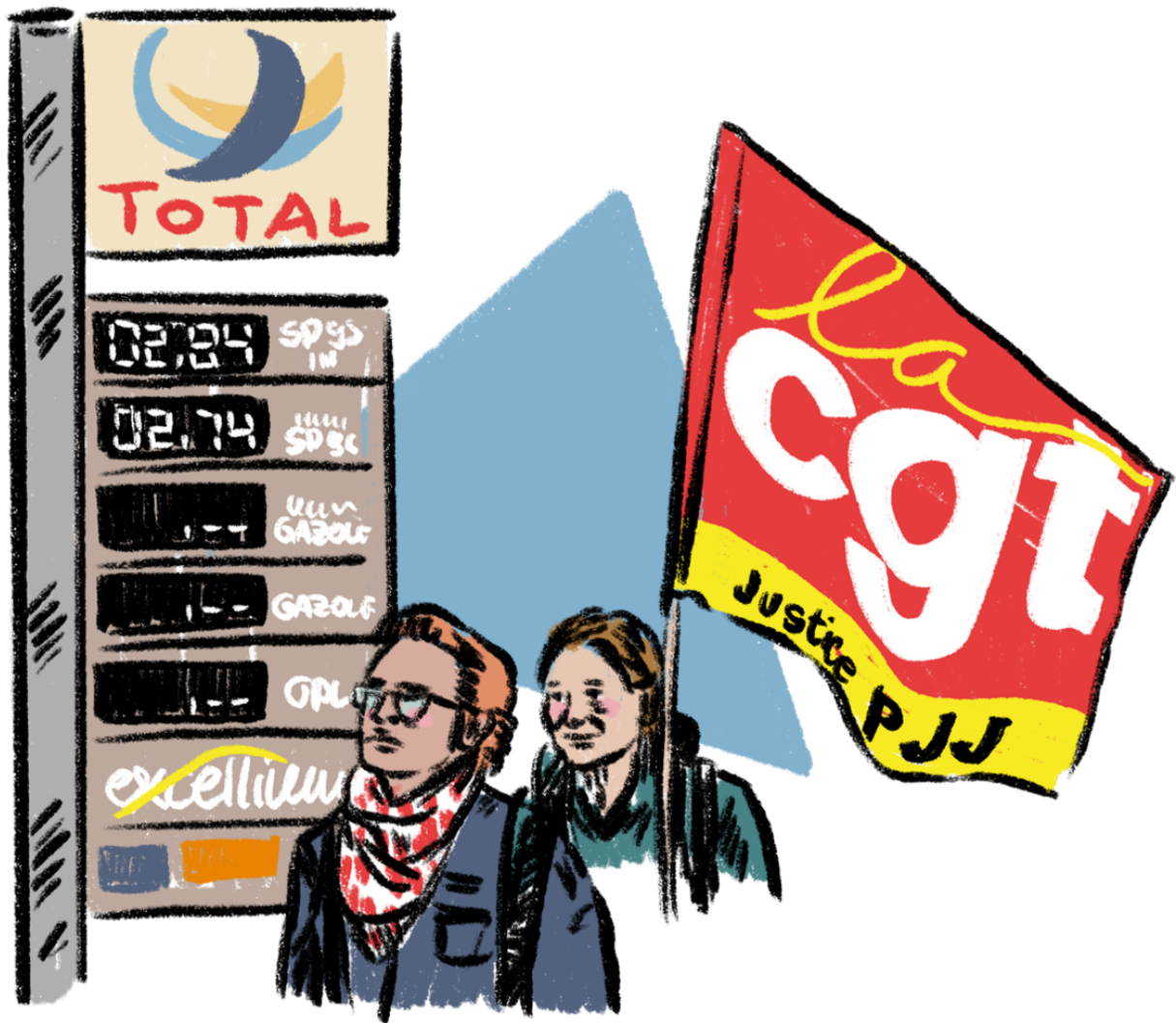
What could be achieved?

The yellow vests could not decisively change Macron's course. But they have rearticulated positions critical of capitalism and rooted in the class struggle, also integrating migrant struggles in the whole.

Police violence is now also addressed socially, linked to a structural analysis of the hierarchical, male-dominated and racist basic consensus within the police.



The harsh lockdown during the Covid 19 pandemic prevented protests for months, but afterwards the yellow vests were present again. Large protests for a strengthening of the public health system followed.

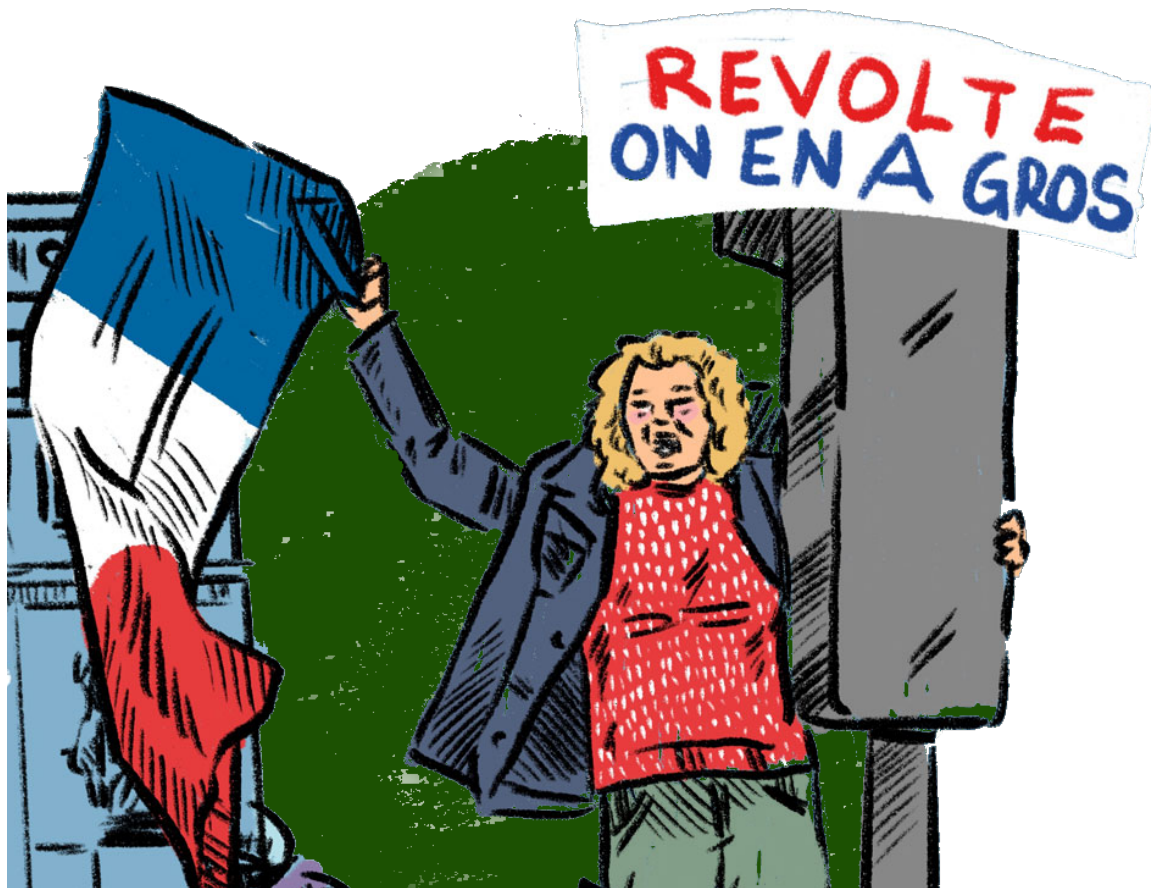


In May 2020, all progressive social organizations and the CGT issued a call for a social-ecological awakening. The pressure of the movements also led to the convergence of the left parties among themselves.

Major Success for the Left-Wing Alliance

Left-wing alliance lists achieved major successes in the local elections of March and June of 2021. In April 2022, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, as the candidate of the Socialist party Rebellious France (LFI), missed the ballot for the presidency by a narrow margin with 21.95% of the votes.

Resistance to Macron's Pension Reform



In 2023, Macron resumed the pension reform he had postponed due to the COVID-19 crisis. The announcement of a gradual increase in the retirement age to 64 by 2030 led to mass protests in France. In cities such as Marseille, Nantes, Lyon, Brest, Paris, and many more, hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets to protest against the neoliberal government's pension reform.

The government also announced that from 2027, people must work for at least 43 years to receive a full pension. According to reports, 400,000 people participated in the protests in Paris alone. 68% of the population are against the reform according to a survey.

Opposition in the Parliament

In the French parliament, two votes of no confidence were proposed against President Emmanuel Macron's government due to the controversial pension reform. However, the government has a majority in parliament and the proposals were rejected. In the first vote, 278 centrist government MPs under President Emmanuel Macron withdrew their confidence, but the pension reform was still passed. The gradual increase in the retirement age from 62 to 64 is now officially adopted.

What Are Demands of the Protests?

- ▶ The demonstrators have given the government an ultimatum to withdraw the law.
- ▶ They also demand that the retirement age be lowered to 60 and wages be increased to counter inflation and the cost of living crisis.

Workers' Solidarity in Europe

Worker-class groups throughout Europe, including the All Workers Militant Front (PAME) in Greece, the Workers' Party of Belgium (PTB/PVDA), the Communist Youth Front (FGC) in Italy, and others, have expressed their solidarity with the workers' protests in France.