

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مباد بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

DECEMBER 12, 2018

by PAUL STREET
13.12.2018

Blacking Out the Yellow Vests on Cable News: Corporate Media Doing its Job



Photo Source Dmitry Dzhus | [CC BY 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/)

The deletion of events that don't fit with the reigning ideology is part of how ruling class-owned media works to manufacture mass consent to unjust hierarchy.

I spent much of last week in a cable-television-equipped U.S.-American apartment with CNN, MSNBC, and FOX News at my fingertips. As I inhabited this abode, flicking between sports and cable news, a political crisis of the state was unfolding in one of the

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

world's richest and most powerful states. France was gripped by an historic working- and middle-class uprising. In the biggest popular unrest seen there since May of 1968, many hundreds of thousands of Gilets Jaunes (“yellow vests”) took to French roadways and other public space in their fourth straight week of explosive mass protests. As Gilbert Mercier wrote last Friday:

“From the Island of La Reunion to the Napoleonic symbol that is the Arc de Triomphe, through big and small towns, as well as the usually bucolic countryside in France, there is something special in the air: the smell of fires on barricades, the smoke of tear gas, the anger built upon decades of inequality, injustice and despair for most. Among the Gilets Jaunes, many understand intuitively that the current democratic process is dead, and therefore the only option is the occupation of streets and roads. History usually moves at a snail's pace, but sometimes a series of events abruptly push societies to a breakdown, to the fascinating and somewhat beautiful and chaotic quantum leap that is a revolution....It is still premature to call the Gilets Jaunes movement a revolution, but one can say categorically that this unexpected and spontaneous grassroots movement has put France on track for the preliminary stages of such a dramatic event.”

As in previous weeks, the yellow traffic vest-wearing crowds did not turn out to politely carry signs and hear speeches. They burned rich folks' cars, trashed bourgeois luxury stores, smashed banks, set up fiery barricades, and engaged in running street battles with tear-gas-wielding and water cannon-spraying riot squads. The number of street rebels remained high – 125,000 or more (300,000 came out on November 17th) – last Saturday even as the government deployed 89,000 police officers to contain the rebellion.

The absurdly unpopular French president, Emmanuel “Hot for Teacher” (HfT) Macron, largely disappeared from public view behind rings of heavily armored protection at his presidential palace. There was talk of Macron calling out the national army to suppress the revolt.

The establishment French media blamed the disturbances on a minority of right-wing and left-wing “extremists” and destructive “casseurs” (vandals and rioters). In reality, the great majority of protestors were ordinary and politico-economically exasperated working-poor and middle class citizens not affiliated with either the far right or the left. The extraordinarily spontaneous and leaderless Gilets Jaunes movement was supported by nearly 80 percent of the French citizenry.

Beneath the pre-revolutionary protests lay a broad popular sense that the arrogant neoliberal former investment banker Macron is “the president of the rich.”

The trigger behind the rolling street agitation and angry crowd behavior came four weeks ago when the government raised taxes on petrol in the name of curbing the climate crisis. The tax sparked road blockades by suburban, ex-urban, and rural French working people, who spend inordinate parts of their largely stagnant incomes on gas thanks in part to their inability to afford the high cost of living in the cities where most of the jobs are located.

The gas levy – repealed by Macron in an effort to place the automobile-torchers last week – was just the proverbial straw that broke the camel’s back. The demonstrations swelled into a broader protest against the bourgeois president’s whole neoliberal agenda. HfT Macron’s provocative measures have included slashing taxes on the wealthy Few (to “spur investment,” of course), hiking pensioners’ taxes, reducing housing allowances, weakening business regulations, curbing union powers, and an educational “reform” that will make it more difficult for young people to attend colleges and universities.

The Gilets Jaunes’ diverse and diffuse demands (there is no centralized yellow vest leadership or agenda/policy platform at this point) go far beyond the repeal of the gas tax. They include reinstatement of the nation’s wealth tax (the “solidarity tax on wealth”/Impôt de solidarité sur la fortune or ISF), increases in the minimum wage and the minimum pension to 1300 Euros a month, government jobs programs, higher taxes on big companies, rent ceilings, expanded mental health services, and a general rollback of austerity policies.

Yellow vest-wearers demand real democracy – popular self-rule. They have called for a popular referendum whereby 700,000 citizen signatories would force the French Parliament to debate and vote on a law within one year. There have been calls (evoking memories of the great French Revolution of 1789) for a Constituent Assembly to draft a new Constitution meant to create a new French government – a Sixth Republic based on popular sovereignty and majority rule, not the plutocratic commands of a de factocorporate-financial dictatorship. Imagine!

Calls for Macron’s resignation have been prominent in Gilets Jaunes rhetoric and graffiti. Many, probably most French people want a new and genuinely democratic governmentnow, not on the ridiculously time-staggered scheduled imposed by an outdated Constitution.

Despite predictable attempts by the right to hijack the movement and notwithstanding an absence of coordination by Left parties or unions, France is experiencing a left-leaning popular and working-class uprising consistent with the French revolutionary tradition of

“Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity.” It is not a neo-fascist or anti-immigrant or anti-environmental petit-bourgeois rebellion. As Mercier writes:

.... What the yellow vests of the *Gilets Jaunes* symbolizes is blue-collar workers, struggling retirees and students who revolt against the suits of the political class and CEOs. ...The *Gilets Jaunes* movement is strictly horizontal, without a hierarchy or recognized leaders. It has, so far, refused to be hijacked by political parties: either the *Rassemblement Nationale* of Marine Le Pen on the far-Right, or *La France Insoumise* of Jean-Luc Melenchon on the Left. It has also rejected association with French labor unions. Without spelling it out, the *Gilets Jaunes* movement is anti-capitalist: a guttural revolt of the have-nots against the elite. It is a popular, not a populist, movement. Europeans and even American populist-nationalists are already distorting the *Gilets Jaunes*’ significance to serve their political agenda. As opposed to the rise of nationalism-populism elsewhere, such as in Italy, Austria, Hungary, the UK as expressed by BREXIT, the US, and Brazil with the election of Bolsonaro, the *Gilets Jaunes* do not have an anti-immigration or even an anti-EU agenda that reeks of racism and **neofascism**. ...The *Gilets Jaunes* are in revolt against capitalism or neoliberalism, which is a worldwide system of concentration of wealth and power into a few hands. With our pending ecological collapse and vanishing biodiversity, capitalism has failed and is reaching its end game. Unlike the neofascist science deniers, the *Gilets Jaunes* perceive climate change as a crisis, but they say that it is hard to focus on a global ecological collapse when you live from paycheck to paycheck. They feel that they deal with the anxiety of putting food on the table at the end of the month while the rich talk about the end of the world. Thinking about humanity’s survival is hard to do on an empty stomach.”

The *Gilets Jaunes* have resisted the nativism of the nationalist right. They have called not for closed borders but rather for improved integration policies to help foreigners settle in France (language and civic education), for all foreign citizens working in France to have the same labor rights as French citizens, and for policies that address the causes of forced migrations.

The yellow vest uprising was/is no small development in a nation that is a leading nuclear power and one of just five permanent member of the United Nations Security Council!

You wouldn’t have known it from U.S. cable news last week or weekend, however. The chatterboxes on CNN, MSNBC, and FOX News could barely break from their week-long commemoration of the imperialist war criminal George H.W. Bush and their breathless

reporting of the latest developments in Bob Mueller RussiaGate investigation to give any serious attention to the momentous events in France.

To be sure, the death of a U.S. president is always a big Orwellian deal for dominant U.S. media. The RussiaGate news (prosecutorial sentencing recommendations for former Trump cronies Michael Flynn and Michael Cohen) was significant. But the near-blackout on France was over-the-top and quite telling given the world-historic import of the story unfolding in one of the world capitalist system's crown-jewel core states – a great Western nation-state whose history has been intimately linked to that of the United States since before and during the American Revolution.

My limited viewing sample last week suggested that FOX News gave the Gilets Jaunes more – and more sympathetic – coverage than did CNN and MSDNC. That's probably because Trump state television (FOX) identifies more with the creeping fascist anti-immigrant French right-wing (Marine Le Pen's National Front) than it does with the neoliberal Macron – and because FOX joined Trump in finding it useful to misrepresent the Yellow Jackets' opposition to the petrol tax as a rejection of positive climate action. Macron is more fashionable and popular at "progressive-neoliberal" CNN and MSNBC.

Still, since the Yellow Jackets have risen up against capitalism in a popular and anti-capitalist movement., arch-capitalist FOX wasn't eager to pay all that much more attention to the street-fighting men and women of France than did the Obama-Macronists at CNN and MSDNC.

There's a very simple reason I had to turn to the Internet to get any decent coverage and commentary on the yellow vests. The problems that have pushed ordinary French people into the streets and to support those ready to destroy bourgeois property are widely present – more present, in fact – in the United States. The U.S. is more plagued than any other rich Western nation by the savage inequality (of both condition and opportunity), plutocracy, corruption, insecurity/precarity, and debasing soullessness of contemporary eco-cidal capitalism – and of a constitutional political set-up that is badly out of step with the needs of its embattled working-class majority. We, too, suffer from the horrid arrogance of a corrupt, out-of-touch political class that represents the rich, not "We the People," in the corridors of policy and power. As the distinguished liberal political scientists Benjamin Page (Northwestern) and Marin Gilens (Princeton) showed in their expertly researched book [Democracy in America?](#) last year:

"the best evidence indicates that the wishes of ordinary Americans actually have had little or no impact on the making of federal government policy. Wealthy individuals and

organized interest groups – especially business corporations – have had much more political clout. When they are taken into account, it becomes apparent that the general public has been virtually powerless...The will of majorities is often thwarted by the affluent and the well-organized, who block popular policy proposals and enact special favors for themselves...Majorities of Americans favor...programs to help provide jobs, increase wages, help the unemployed, provide universal medical insurance, ensure decent retirement pensions, and pay for such programs with progressive taxes. Most Americans also want to cut ‘corporate welfare.’ Yet the wealthy, business groups, and structural gridlock have mostly blocked such new policies [and programs] (emphasis added).”

We, like the French, get to vote? Super! Mammon reigns nonetheless in the United States, where, Page and Gilens find, “government policy...reflects the wishes of those with money, not the wishes of the millions of ordinary citizens who turn out every two years to choose among the preapproved, money-vetted candidates for federal office” (emphasis added). Plus ça change, plus c’est la meme chose.

“World’s great democracy?” University of Kentucky history department chair Ronald Formisamo’s latest book is titled volumes: [American Oligarchy: The Permanence of the Political Class](#) (University of Illinois, 2017). By Formisamo’s detailed account, U.S. politics and policy are under the control of a “permanent political class” – a “networked layer of high-income people” including Congressional representatives (half of whom are millionaires), elected officials, campaign funders, lobbyists, consultants, appointed bureaucrats, pollsters, television celebrity journalists, university presidents, and executives at well-funded nonprofit institutions. This “permanent political class,” Formisamo warns, is taking the nation “beyond [mere] plutocracy” to “the hegemony of an aristocracy of inherited wealth.” It:

“drives economic and political inequality not only with the policies it has constructed over the past four decades, such as federal and state tax systems rigged to favor corporations and the wealthy; it also increases inequality by its self-dealing, acquisitive behavior as it enables, emulates, and enmeshes itself with the wealthiest One Percent and .01 percent ...[It engages in] the direct creation of inequality by channeling the flow of income and wealth to elites [while]... its self-aggrandizement creates a culture of corruption that infects the entire society and that induces many to abuse positions of power to emulate or rise into the One Percent” ...[and as it] contributes to continuing high levels of poverty and disadvantage for millions that exceed almost all advanced nations.”

We also chafe under the limiting of our supposed grand “input” on excessive executive branch power to preposterously time-staggered elections scheduled by an archaic Constitution. “Our” decrepit charter was drafted and passed behind locked doors by and for wealthy slaveholders and merchant capitalists for whom popular sovereignty was the ultimate nightmare during the time of Louis XVI.

We, too, are badly overdue for another revolution and the holding of a national Constituent Assembly to draft a new Constitution based on real popular sovereignty and the advance of the common good and over and against the unelected and environmentally catastrophic dictatorship of capital.

Thanks to all of this and more, the yellow vests could prove highly contagious to millions of ordinary U.S.-Americans if the French movement was give anything like the coverage it deserves in “mainstream” U.S. media. Hence the ruling-class “mainstream” cable networks’ near blackout of the Gilets Jaunes.