

The French ‘Yellow Vest’ Movement Will Not Go Away

On February 1, Jacques Cheminade, former French Presidential candidate, founder of the French political party Solidarité et Progrès (*Solidarity and Progress*) and long-time friend and collaborator of Lyndon LaRouche, gave the following interview in English to RT’s twice-weekly “SophieCo” news program hosted by Sophie Shevardnadze. The full video is available [here](#). The following is an edited transcript of this important interview. Sub-heads have been added.

Sophie Shevardnadze: Mr. Cheminade, the streets of Paris are getting even more colorful: with Blue Vests and Red Scarves, new movements that marched just recently to voice their frustration with the Yellow Vest protests. Is this a sign that the French are getting fed up with all the commotion? Is this the beginning of a serious pushback?

Jacques Cheminade: What should get our attention is not the streets of Paris, but what is happening throughout France. The Yellow Vests are a reaction against the state, against the administration, against the institutions and against President Emmanuel Macron—Macron as seen by these people who have gone to the streets, after having been forgotten for so many years. They are the forgotten majority, people who desperately desire to recover their sovereignty, and who desire a state that is *their* state. “We are the people,” they are saying.

That is very important. In the provinces, the people of the Yellow Vest movement are still meeting; despite the efforts of the authorities to get rid of them, they are still around. In Paris, it’s different; when they came to Paris, it was to show the ruling elites that the whole of France would come to Paris. In Paris, they encountered all those provocateurs, from the extreme left to the ex-

Yellow Vest protests resemble beginning of French Revolution – ex-presidential candidate

Published time: 1 Feb, 2019 07:42
Edited time: 2 Feb, 2019 09:29



Jacques Cheminade, former presidential candidate and founder of the Solidarity and Progress Party



The Yellow Vest protests have paralysed France for weeks on end, sending shockwaves across Europe. Is this a new French revolution in the making, or just a splash in the Seine? We ask Jacques Cheminade, former presidential candidate and founder of the Solidarity and Progress Party.

Jacques Cheminade is interviewed by Sophie Shevardnadze for the RT television network.

treme right, and also the government, all trying to disrupt the motion of the movement. But the movement continues to exist, it’s a groundswell, it’s there.

These people are protesting a policy that claims that by reducing taxes on the very rich, they will invest, and profits will trickle down from the top to their level. The Yellow Vests are crying out: “It’s not true!” The money stays at the top, and the leftovers also evaporate back to the upper classes of society. So they protest: “We want money back!” That’s the issue.

Shevardnadze: We all understand what’s behind the Yellow Vests. Everyone understands it. It’s a popular uproar against Macron’s policies for the rich; but the point is, whatever we are seeing right now in the streets of Paris, whether it’s Yellow Vests or the counter-protests, with the Blue Vests and Red Scarves—those are also people, right? And they seem to be clashing with

each other. The political center has been routinely described as dead in our era of polarization, but now there are the counter-protests. Is this a sign that the center could be actually coming back to life?

Cheminade: Well, Macron looks at politics as an omelette with an extreme left and an extreme right, and proudly proclaims: “We occupy the center.” The problem is that the center is rotten. The French elites, at the center, have submitted to financial globalism.

These Yellow Vests have begun to understand that. For them, the protest started with the reduction of the speed limit from 90 kph to 80 kph some months ago—making their commutes horribly longer, to get to jobs that are very far from where they live—and they protested. Then, the price of gasoline went up when new taxes were levied, reducing most people’s purchasing power. They are calling thus for a return to human dignity.

What they now understand is that something bigger than France is the real issue, and that the issue is financial globalism. They want France to reclaim the issuance of its own currency, which is now in the hands of the European Central Bank; in the hands of the world’s financial markets. The Yellow Vests have a sense that if they regain that sovereignty, they can have a decent education, steady employment in small and middle-sized firms, good police protection, and a good army. They are calling for all of that and more. They want schools, they want hospitals, they want the services that France used to guarantee for all its people.



CC/Thomas Bresson

Yellow Vests demonstrators in Belfort, France on December 29, 2018.

What about the Violence?

Shevardnadze: The message behind Yellow Vests is a noble message, no one really disputes that, but the point is what it has turned into—the whole chaos that it has brought along. Eleven people have died at Yellow Vests protests, since they broke out in mid-November, none the result of police action. That’s a lot. The level of brutality at these protests has been remarkable. How do you explain this?



Cheminade: France has always been a very tense country. All the social advances made in the past are being threatened today. It’s not the inequality per se, but the lack of opportunity to achieve a better life. These people are protesting against that unfairness. The municipal police in the big cities were not organized to handle such protests, or were given weapons against demonstrators that were not adequate. Now they have all these Defense Ball Launchers, formerly called Flash-Balls, but now a higher performing device. And then they have

How Facebook Groups sparked a crisis in France

The Yellow Vest movement was organized on Facebook — and now it has spilled into the streets

By Casey Brown | @CaseyBrown | Dec 4, 2018 10:41am EST



Nurse from Normandy Ingrid Levavasseur turns yellow vests into political force



Two months ago Ingrid Levavasseur was an unemployed nursing

street protesters?

Cheminade: According to the official government reports, 1,700 demonstrators have been injured and 1,000 police. Out of those injured, 100 have been seriously hurt and eleven have died, most of the casualties resulting from encounters at the road blockades in the early days of the protests. One woman was shot in the head as she was watching from a window. Jérôme Rodrigues, one of the charismatic leaders, was hit by a Defense Ball Launcher in the head and will probably

lose one eye.

This has stirred up even more discontent, because everyone is saying that the police have been given a free hand to handle the demonstrations with excessive force. I think this is absolutely true. In France, the state is like a pyramid, and this pyramid is being shaken by these demonstrators. Everyone in the pyramid is tending to overreact, and at this point, the only way out is to for the state to give the demonstrators some of what they are asking for.

these grenades, they call them instantaneous tear gas grenades.

All this has happened because there was no coordinating agency to handle what happened. It was not expected by the people in power. I expected it. I wrote in 2009 about the anger that was coming. The anger is there now, but it has been growing for a long time. There is a tension in the whole country. People have been provoked, in a sense. It is the provocateurs who have dismantled the French social system—not those who are calling for justice and truth.

Shevardnadze: Tell me a little bit more about the police response. A bunch of people have lost their eyesight, and in some cases, their eyes, as a result of police using these new anti-riot weapons. At the same time, the Interior Minister is denying the charges of police brutality. Do you think that the acts of police violence are random in the heat-of-the-moment accidents, or do you feel that the security forces, a lot of whom have also been injured, are just losing their patience with the

Shevardnadze: Violence, as we all know, makes news. I guess there is no such thing as bad publicity, after all. Do you feel that the controversy is part of what has kept the movement going, bolstering its outreach—and perhaps keeping it going?

Cheminade: Well, the Yellow Vests started by person-to-person contacts, and then they turned to Facebook. Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook’s CEO, changed the algorithms, so the Yellow Vests were able to connect among themselves in a much more efficient and faster way. It’s a kind of “Battleship Potemkin” effect. Something wrong happens—the sailors are given bad meat, and there is a revolt.

What’s important is what is behind the movement. Of course, the media, by filming everything, and the use of social networks—people using mobile phones to film everything—all of this has contributed to accelerating the motion. Yes, a lot of wrong things have been said by many people. And there are also various conspiratorial



President of France Emmanuel Macron.



Cheminade: Well, the Yellow Vests are very angry, because, as I said, the government offers something and then reneges on it. The Yellow Vests don't like this approach. It's not a compromise, it's not something positive, it's simply a sort of blackmail.

views—some people claim that the Yellow Vest movement is extreme right; others are sure it is extreme left.

Still other people say that Russia organized the movement. All these competing and conflicting opinions have created an enormous amount of confusion. What I said before was an attempt to make the real issues clear.

Macron's Fake 'Great National Debate'

Shevardnadze: Mr. Cheminade, Emmanuel Macron is now on a tour through the country's regions with a so-called "Great Debate"—Q&A sessions with local representatives. Do you think this is something that the Yellow Vests have forced him to do, something useful, or is he just trying to pull the rug out from under the feet of the Yellow Vests movement?

Cheminade: He's trying to control the debate, and he appointed two ministers to organize the debate. The Yellow Vests won't fall into the trap, it's clear. President Macron, in his letter to the Frenchmen said, and I'll read from it—"Be as it may, we cannot continue to reduce taxes without lowering the entire level of our public expenditures." So, if that's his starting point, there is no way to give a right answer to the demands of the Yellow Vests. He doesn't take into consideration the possibility of using national sovereign credit.

Shevardnadze: These protests were partially triggered by the "climate tax" that has now been rolled back. How much more do the protesters want to achieve? And can they?

Tax the Rich, or Issue Public Credit?

Shevardnadze: One of the points that has been coming up in the debate around the Yellow Vest movement is the idea that there's a need for higher taxes on the rich. Earlier I spoke to Jacob Frenkel of JPMorgan Chase, who told me that such measures end up dissuading the rich from saving and investment and thus hamper growth for all. Won't a tax on the wealthy only drive them away from France, into tax havens?

Cheminade: Some wealthy people have already moved out of France. The issue is not their personal wealth. The issue is not so much to tax the rich, it's to create wealth, and you create wealth by issuing public credit for the future, betting on the future. This was the policy of France after World War II, when there was nobody to tax. There was no wealth, there was nothing to sell and no money to be found. We used public credit—a bet on the future, and it worked—France was reconstructed. Russia—the Soviet Union at that time—was also reconstructed by the will of the people, issuing credit for the future. That's the issue. It's not to tax the rich as such.

Leadership in a Different Kind of Movement

Shevardnadze: The Yellow Vests don't seem to have a leader. It's really hard to understand what exactly they want. There is no one person who speaks for these people. How can Macron placate them and give in to their demands, when they don't even have a go-to working group to talk to or negotiate with?

Cheminade: In a way it's very different, but it looks in some ways like the beginning of the French Revolution, when there were no leaders either. As a movement, these people—those who have put on the yellow vests—haven't known each other before, most have never participated in demonstrations at all. They are craftsmen,

they are middle-class people from working-class backgrounds, that's who they are. So, they found themselves together: one person saw that the king was naked, and another saw that the financial king was naked—and they said to each other: “Yes, we all think the same thing, and we want to be together, and we despise political institutions, we despise politicians.” The level of respect for politicians in France is now at 9%. The most respected institutions are public hospitals, at 90%.

These people are afraid of being leaders. It's what some would call—Rosa Luxemburg had called—mass strike ferment. It's a ferment. In this ferment, there's no real leader. Some may appear as leaders, like Eric Drouet or Priscillia Ludovsky. There are some names. Others tried to launch a list for the European elections. It turned out the list was patronized by Macron, because he's counting on a list of Yellow Vests to siphon votes out of the extreme left, extreme right and out of the center-right opposition.

There are all these calculations, but the Yellow Vest movement is indeed difficult to characterize politically. The only way to give them a purpose is to focus on the issuance of money as credit, how that will be issued and for what. If not, the movement will remain only as a groundswell, hitting the institutions and the political world, but not going anywhere. In the United States, Trump was elected for the same reason. In Italy, the so-called “populist” government came into power. In France the ferment expresses something more; it goes more in-depth, into the fabric of society.

The Citizens Referendum Initiative

Shevardnadze: Talking about the fabric of society—here you have all of these people, a lot of them united by what they *oppose*. Do you think the movement will split as soon as the time comes to decide what they will be *for*? Because right now the only thing uniting them is the “against.”

Cheminade: Well, what unites them is also the Citizens Referendum Initiative, RIC. The Yellow Vests want that because they want *participatory* policies. They are fed up with *representative* policies. At the same time—it's very interesting—they need education. To become educated in how society functions is a long process. They know it functions in a wrong way, but they don't know how to make it function in a right way. My job as,



Jacques Cheminade speaks with Yellow Vest demonstrators, December 2018. S&P

let's say, a dissident politician, is to educate them to understand what they need to do positively. It's difficult, it will be an educational task that will take some time.

One of these Yellow Vests, in southern France, launched a petition calling for a national bank, saying there should be a referendum on that, and not as the government is trying to manipulate the situation, on abortion, for or against, or the death penalty, for and against—not on so-called societal issues; but on real issues, which is how you organize a state, how money is issued by the state, and for what purpose? And this demand, to be truthful, demands a break with the present European Union, and a respect for true European civilization.

One, Two, Many ‘Yellow Vests’

Shevardnadze: It seems to me that the Yellow Vests are like other street movements—Occupy Wall Street, or even the Arab Spring, or the Greek and Spanish protests. Do you see any similarities?

Cheminade: As of now, the Yellow Vests are meeting in assemblies throughout the country, in which they are trying to figure out what they want. We are at this point. But at the same time there are other movements developing: a movement of nursing aides; a growing movement in hospitals to stop the cuts in funding; nurses and doctors are in a state of rebellion. We have the *Stylos Rouges* (Red Pens) teachers—if you want to measure the collapse in social conditions in this country, look at what happened to teachers. In the beginning of his career, a teacher used to reach more or less twice—200%—the average wage. Now it's only 100%.



CC/Thomas Bresson

Yellow Vest demonstrators fill the streets of Belfort, France on December 1, 2018.



The income of people in all the of social services has dropped. That explains, in part at least, the Yellow Vests. The other part is that they don't feel represented by the usual politicians, and they are trying to find among themselves those who will represent them. So, really, it's not short-term.

Shevardnadze: With a grassroots leaderless movement like the Yellow Vests, you will have your share of wacky people, *crazy* people—but it seems that anti-Semitism, belief in conspiracy theories, Holocaust denial—all of that is very much present among the Yellow Vests. Do you feel that the Yellow Vests are maybe in danger of being hijacked by radicals like this?

Cheminade: No, I don't think so. They are being *provoked* by radicals all the time, but they themselves are isolating the radicals. Being this type of uprising, in the beginning they had no security awareness, but little by little, with the help of some trade-unionists, they have been able to organize a security force for their demonstrations. It's a process of education, and my bet is that this process of education will lead them in a good direction, good for the people, and good for the nation.

A Long-Term Educational Process

After all, the French Constitution proclaims that the principle of France is a government of the people, for the people, and by the people. They have to understand that that means respect for the responsibility of the state, and that not everything can be turned over to the private

sector. Certainly rage is present, but it's limited to a very few Yellow Vests. For the most part violence has been provoked by extreme right-wing and extreme left-wing agitators, and, probably, also perpetrated by some in the police, or even in the government, who expected that violence would discredit the Yellow Vests. I think these tactics won't work.

Shevardnadze: Some Yellow Vests want to branch out into traditional politics, preparing to run for the European elections; others condemn that idea and have pledged to keep up their street brand of politics.

How wide can this division get? Can the rift grow big enough to splinter the movement?

Cheminade: This idea of a European Parliament list is already absolutely discredited. Ingrid Levavasseur, a nurse who is heading a list of candidates affiliated with the Yellow Vests to run in the next European elections, was recruited by BFM TV [a French 24-hour business news channel], which is a media outlet generally hated by the Yellow Vests. She has no authority to head such a list, and already two people have quit. One of them, a hidden Macron agent, had to leave when he was discovered. So, this list will lead nowhere.

The true leaders, the few leaders who have influence, are not leaders in the usual sense, but are people who serve as reference points for the Yellow Vests. They call for no list and they call for long-term thinking and education, and from that they believe will come an in-depth motion in French society, whose impact will go far beyond the European elections.

I think these European elections are, in advance, fake. We have on the one side so-called populists or nationalists or sovereigntists, and on the other side progressives, so-called reformists. The election is just an artificial construct; it's nothing, it doesn't address the real problems of the country. The Yellow Vests are more connected to the real problems of the country than the politicians running in the European elections.

Shevardnadze: All right, Mr. Cheminade. Thank you very much for this interview.