
France's crackdown on protesters: 'Govt has nothing to offer except blood, sweat & tears'

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In democracy, you can't ban people from expressing their opinions and anger during a demonstration, publisher and writer Aymeric Monville told RT, commenting on the French government's plan to crack down on unsanctioned protests.

French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe said on Monday that tougher punishments will be introduced for rioters with 80,000 members of the security forces to be deployed next weekend. The government plans to draft new [legislation](#) that will ban troublemakers from marches and clamp down on the wearing of masks at demonstrations.

Publisher and writer Aymeric Monville told RT that the spirit of this new law is "*to treat the demonstrators like they were hooligans.*"

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"In France you can prevent hooligans from going to the football match; it will be the same with the demonstrators. The problem in the democracy – you can't ban people from expressing their opinion and anger during a demonstration; it is completely silly," he said.

While the announced government measures against violence in the protest movement received mixed reactions, President Emmanuel Macron's [plan](#) for a nationwide public debate also received a lot of attention.

On Tuesday, the official appointed by the government to lead a national debate quit following a controversy over her salary. It was revealed that the former sports minister, Chantal Jouanno, was paid over €14,000 per month to head France's National Commission for Public Debate.

That is while many protesters *"can't feed their children,"* Monville noted.

"It is so blatant, it is like at the time of the absolute monarchy – Marie-Antoinette [allegedly] said if people don't have bread, let them eat cake – if they don't have bread, let them debate," he said.

"The government doesn't have anything to offer except blood, sweat and tears."

Monville said that philosopher Luc Ferry, who was close to government circles, [suggested](#) the police should be allowed to use guns on protesters. *"But people are not cattle; as human beings they can respond... You can slip into a civil war. It is a very risky situation, because the government doesn't have any answer,"* Monville argued.

Commenting on the violence during the recent Yellow Vests protests, Monville said it is necessary to distinguish between two kinds of protesters.

"You have the violence on the streets, you have burnt cars – they have nothing to do with the real movement. The Yellow Vests' pressure is to block the roundabouts, all refineries... to block the economy. And that is what annoys the government and big businesses in France."

That is the violence they cannot stand and will impose state violence against it, he said.

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Yellow Vests split

RT also discussed the latest demonstrations and the PM's announcement with Dr. Paul Smith, associate professor in French and Francophone Studies at the University of Nottingham, who believes that there is a split within the Yellow Vests movement.

"This weekend might have been a tipping point... there is clearly within the Yellow Vest movement a split between the very hard liners, the men and women of violence, and those who want this to be a peaceful demonstration," he said.

He noted that on Sunday there was a big [demonstration](#) by women in yellow vests insisting on the peaceful aspect of the Gilets Jaunes movement. He also pointed out that the moderates within the movement are [talking](#) about founding their own political party to press their issues and ideas in a peaceful way.

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"Whereas there is still this hardcore and someone might not even be authentic Gilet Jaunes, quite a lot of anarchist troublemakers are involved in and, not to say, extreme alt-right elements involved as well," he added.

Commenting on the French PM's statement on security measures, Smith said that *"the prime minster [is] saying we are not going to be pushed around, the rule of law will continue."*

According to Smith, some of the crowds are *"legitimate Gilet Jaunes"* while there also are *"professional protesters, black blocs, the anarchist movement."*

"On the alt-right there are even some who are kind of a leftover of protests against other legislation from the previous presidency. This is kind of an amalgamation of the anti-everybody league. Plus legitimate Gilets Jaunes who are involved as well. And it is very much of an amalgam of all of those elements. The volume aspect is certainly on the decrease," he told RT.

In his opinion, the government is saying that the law is the law.

"Last week we saw one of the ring leaders was arrested for getting involved deliberately – by his own admission – in an unauthorized demonstration, and you

and I know how much the French love to demonstrate," he said.

He said that France has clear laws about when and where you can demonstrate, and declaring where you demonstrate. He believes the government is saying "*you can do these things, but you have to respect the law.*"

"The other thing that is happening in the background is that now they have just opened or about to open this process of public consultation that is linked to the whole movement. So, there are two things happening – the government is saying the dialogue is now open and that is a peaceful thing and that happens through the 36,000 town halls across France. And that will be their way – their means of separating the 'legitimate' Gilets Jaunes movement and those who want to continue down the path of violence."
