

Движение «желтые жилеты» во Франции: проблемы, причины, перспективы

Ефанова Людмила Дмитриевна

канд. пед. наук, ФГБОУ ВО «Государственный университет управления», г. Москва,
Российская Федерация, ORCID ID: 0000-0002-2632-1035, e-mail: efanovald@mail.ru

Аннотация

Протестное движение «желтые жилеты» началось во Франции в конце 2018 г. Эти протесты являются самыми массовыми в стране в период с 1968 г. В статье рассмотрены причины возникновения движения «желтых жилетов» и динамика вовлечения в них представителей различных регионов Франции. Вначале со стороны протестующих в качестве претензии к французскому правительству высказывалось несогласие с повышением налогов на топливо. Постепенно требования все более расширялись, приобретая политическую окраску.

Большая часть населения стала жить хуже по причине снижения доходов. Рейтинг Президента Франции Э. Макрона с момента его вступления в должность заметно упал, а поддержка со стороны населения страны значительно снизилась. За время его президентства налоговые послабления коснулись в основном только крупного бизнеса. Бедные слои населения были ущемлены по причине сокращения социальных выплат, а также возрастания прямого и косвенного налогов.

Основные причины возникновения движения «желтые жилеты» заключаются в недовольстве французов своим экономическим положением и снижением уровня жизни. Отмечается, что данное движение вышло за пределы Франции, охватив другие государства Западной Европы такие, как Бельгия, Испания, Великобритания, Германия, Швеция, которые испытывают подобные проблемы. Также в статье рассмотрены основные отличия данного протестного движения от тех, которые случались во Франции ранее. Представлены экономические и политические требования, которые были выдвинуты со стороны протестующих к своему правительству и Президенту Э. Макрону. Рассмотрены перспективы развития движения «желтых жилетов» в современной Франции.

Ключевые слова: недовольство населения, протестные акции, повышение цен на автомобильное топливо, снижение уровня жизни, миграционная политика, налоговая политика, экономические требования, политические требования, рейтинг президента, изменения в Конституции.

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The “yellow vests” movement in France: problems, causes, prospects

Efanova Lyudmila

Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences, Associate Professor, State University of Management, Moscow,
Russia, ORCID ID: 0000-0002-2632-1035, e-mail: efanovald@mail.ru

Abstract

The “yellow vests” protest movement began in France at the end of 2018. These protests are the most widespread in the country since 1968. The causes of the emergence of the “yellow vests” movement and the dynamics of the involvement in them of representatives of various regions of France have been considered in the article. Initially, the protesters expressed disagreement with the increase in taxes on fuel as a claim against the French government. Gradually, the requirements expanded more and more, acquiring political overtones.

Most of the population began to live worse due to lower incomes. The rating of the French President E. Macron has fallen markedly since his inauguration, and the support of the country’s population has declined significantly. During his presidency, tax breaks mainly affected only large businesses. The poor people were disadvantaged due to the reduction of social payments, as well as an increase in direct and indirect taxes.

The main reasons of occurrence of the “yellow vests” movement are the dissatisfaction of the French with their economic position and the decline in the living standards. The article notes, that this movement has gone beyond the borders of France, covering other Western European countries such as Belgium, Spain, Italy, Germany, Sweden, which are experiencing similar problems. The main differences of this protest movement from those, that happened in France before, have been considered in the article. The economic and political demands, that were put forward by the protesters to their government and President E. Macron have been presented. The prospects for the development of the “yellow vests” movement in modern France have been considered.

Keywords: discontent of population, protest rallies, rising fuel prices, lower living standards, migration policy, tax policy, economic demands, political demands, President’s rating, changes in the Constitution.

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France had always differed from many other countries, that people expressed their dissatisfaction with the government, going to the streets of cities and actively protesting against what they were not satisfied with. The French are a nation of active and freedom-loving people who are not ready to put up with what is unfair from their point of view and who are able to defend firmly their positions before the state. This is confirmed by the four revolutions, that history of France has [1; 2; 3; 4; 5].

Street protests, which took place at different times in France, are incalculable. However, as some researchers note, the protests of the “yellow vests”, that began in the country since the end of 2018 are the most numerous and fierce since the period of street protests of 1968.

The first demonstration of the “yellow vests” movement began on November 17, 2018 in several cities of France at once. Naturally, the most numerous street protests took place traditionally in the capital of France – Paris. All in all, about 280,000 protesters took to the streets of that city. From this time on, the protest movement in France continues every day, especially increasing on Saturdays, when the largest number of people goes to rallies. For example, on November 24, 2018 more than 106 000 people took part in protest actions across the country, on December 1, 2018–136,000, on February 23, 2019–46,600 [6].

In addition to the fact that the shares of “yellow vests” are quite numerous within France itself, they gradually spread to other European countries. For example, today, protest actions of “yellow vests” are already taking place in Belgium and Spain. It is obvious, that the questions raised by the “yellow vests” concern not only the French people, but also the residents of other European states, who are also dissatisfied with the policies, pursued by their government.

It is worth looking into, why the protesters received the name “yellow vests”. This name comes from the fact that all the participants of the protest actions are wearing retro-reflective bright yellow vests that every French driver must have in his car according to 2008 legislation. This has its specific meaning, since the first protests were caused by the French’s discontent over the increase in the excise tax on fuel from January 1, 2019 in France.

The government of Emmanuel Macron planned to increase the tax on fuel. At the same time, these taxes were already raised in France in 2018: by 3.9 eurocents per liter of gasoline and 7.6 eurocents per liter of diesel fuel. From the beginning of 2019, it was planned to increase taxes on fuel by another 2.9 and 6.5 eurocents, respectively. The reason for this increase, according to Macron, was concern for improving the environment and the desire to reduce the number of French people using personal vehicles, transplanting them to public transport,

or buying electric vehicles that, according to their developers, do not have a strong influence on environmental pollution. However, the increase in fuel prices in 2018, of course, caused discontent among the population, but nevertheless it was accepted, but the prospect of paying for fuel even further in the future caused such a storm of protest, which led to mass street protests.

The issue of automotive fuel prices concerns a huge part of the population of France, as ever-increasing housing prices force many French people, who work in low-paid jobs to move from the city center to their outskirts, where renting an apartment is cheaper. But getting to work has to go further than from the center, which requires the use of transport. The issue of movement is exacerbated by the fact that the privatization of the railway network has contributed to higher prices for travel by this type of transport, as well as insufficient investment in public transport. Therefore a private car is the means, that enables French residents to have the most convenient and acceptable movement. The upcoming increase in fuel prices would immediately affect the pockets of the majority of the population of France, which is already short of money.

While initially the protesters expressed their disagreement with the increase in taxes on fuel as a claim to the French government, then gradually the requirements expanded more and more, acquiring an obvious political tint. Slogans “Macron Must Leave”, “Macron – President for the Rich”, etc. appeared.

It is obvious that this wave of protests is caused not only by the increase in fuel taxes, but also by the fact that the majority of the country’s population, belonging to the poor segments of society, began to live worse because of lower incomes. The rating of Macron since his inauguration as President has fallen markedly, and the support of the population has weakened. This is not surprising, since during his presidency tax breaks have mainly affected only large businesses, while the poor, on the contrary, have been affected by the reduction of social benefits, as well as the increase in direct and indirect taxes.

The main reasons for the protest movement lie in the French discontent with their economic situation and the decline in living standards. However, we must not forget that the reasons for the deterioration of the economic situation in the country are always caused by mistakes made in foreign and domestic policy by the leaders of the state. Therefore, Macron’s position that “politics can be done without politics” was shattered by reality. In addition, since, as noted by political analysts, macron received a Parliament without real opposition, its only chance, left without a party, was to go out with protests on the street [11].

The migration policy pursued in France causes great dissatisfaction among the indigenous population. The population is extremely dissatisfied with the flow of migrants that has flowed into the country in recent years, and the associated increase in crime rates. For example, the exit to the street on December 10, 2018 was due to public dissatisfaction with the fact that on this day it was planned to sign the Marrakesh Pact, according to which about 60 million migrants will arrive in the European Union.

Moreover, it should be noted that the dissatisfaction with the current economic situation and the internal policy of his government is typical not only for the inhabitants of France, but also for the population of other European countries, where many segments of society are also dissatisfied with their situation. It is for this reason that the movement of “yellow vests” so quickly went beyond the French Republic, gradually covering other States. First it covered Belgium, then it began in Spain. Against the Covenant of Marrakech were protesting residents of Germany and Sweden [8].

At the beginning, that is on November 17, 2018, when protestors took to the streets of many French cities, Emmanuel Macron was not going to yield to the protesters and satisfy their demands. Thus, about 80,000 security forces were transferred to Paris to create a numerical superiority over the protesters and to suppress this protest by force. Tear gas was used, in some cases the police behaved quite harshly with the protesters. Mass arrests were carried out. However, it was not possible to suppress the movement.

Emmanuel Macron was forced to make concessions. First of all, he announced that the price of motor fuel will be frozen. That is, the primary requirement of protesters in fact was satisfied. But by this time the “yellow vests” protest movement gained strength and its participants were no longer enough to meet only this specific requirement. In total, they put forward a total of twenty-five demands to the government of France.

These requirements include an increase in wages by 40 %, a ban on taxes exceeding 25 % of the state of citizens, the creation of new jobs, an increase in the construction of affordable housing, a decrease in mortgage interest. The protesters' demands also concern the tightening of migration policy: stopping the flow of migrants to the European Union.

In addition to these requirements, there are also those that concern changes to the Constitution. For example, one of the requirements is to rewrite the French Constitution with popular support in the interests of the sovereignty of the people. There are also demands to immediately stop privatization and return the railways, airports, parking lots, etc., to state ownership, to guarantee civil

liberties, to prescribe in the Constitution a complete ban on state intervention in the Affairs of education, health and the institution of the family.

As for foreign policy issues, the “yellow vests” require France's withdrawal from NATO, as well as the prohibition to use its army in wars of aggression, to stop interfering in the affairs of African countries and to return from there the French military.

The “yellow vests” haven't avoided environmental issues, requiring, for example, to re-industrialize the country, in order to abandon imports as causing the greatest harm to the environment [7].

Of course, any protest actions create a lot of problems in the country. Currently, the demonstrations of “yellow vests” are quite peaceful and civilized. However, the first performances were not without burning cars, broken windows, wounded and even dead. When riots occur, they are always attended by a certain part of the population, which is prone to offenses and crimes that they commit under the guise of protesters. In addition, various parties are always trying to take advantage of protest moods of the population, which sometimes have not quite acceptable goals.

For example, at the beginning of their speeches, protesters smashed shops, built barricades on the Champs Elysees, resulting in trade in the area decreased by 70 %, burned tires, broke road signs. Due to the current situation, about 40 museums, many cafes, shops and other public institutions were closed to the public, many metro stations were closed. Of course, the number of tourists wishing to visit France has decreased dramatically, which also had a negative impact on the work of many French, for example, guides, hotel workers, sellers, cooks, etc. People have suffered very real material losses. In addition, some architectural and historical monuments were damaged. For example, on December 1, 2018, the legendary Arc de Triomphe, one of the symbols of Paris, was damaged. The museum was destroyed, some exhibits were smashed and painted. Several gas stations were blocked by the protesters, as a result of which they were left without fuel and could not fill the cars of those who wanted [9].

The problem for the government of France is that the “yellow vests” movement does not have a single leader with whom it would be possible to conduct constructive negotiations. People, who have claims to the government and are dissatisfied with the situation in the country, are concentrated around this protest movement. For the most part, their organization is carried out through social networks. This unites very different strata of society around the movement, which often have directly opposite requirements.

Analyzing the demands put forward by the protesters, it is easy to notice the fact that they are a combination of the Euro-skepticism of the extreme right and the

extreme left, that is, practically incompatible with the actual implementation of the requirement. For example, they contain both the requirement to restrict the migration flow in the European Union and the requirement to restrict banking monopolies. Moreover, there are frankly populist demands, mainly concerning the ecology, which are practically impracticable in general in the modern realities of France.

In general, many of the requirements that are voiced are now popular in neighboring Italy, where the extreme right and Euro-skeptics won the election. In Belgium, there is also an increase in such sentiments. In Germany, “Alternative for Germany” is gaining more and more votes. All this is expressed in a kind of European “Social Bolshevism”, the development of which can lead to unpredictable consequences.

Today, despite the fact that Emmanuel Macron agreed to meet certain requirements put forward by “yellow vests”, such as: a moratorium on fuel prices during the year, an increase in the minimum wage of 100 euros per month, cancellation of personal income tax for overtime, cancellation of personal income tax on the amount of the premium for the year, the abolition of tax for pensioners with incomes of less than 2,000 euros per month, protest actions are still ongoing. Protesters are making new and new demands [12].

“Yellow vests” do not identify themselves as either right or left, and do not wish to join any of the existing parties. At the same time, people participating in this movement are extremely suspicious of both the government and representatives of various parties and public organizations, that is, they distrust all professional politicians. Some political scientists say, that this movement

may eventually lead to the emergence of a completely new political force in France, to some extent similar to the 5 Star Movement, formed in Italy, combining both the ideas of the extreme left and the extreme right.

Other political analysts completely disagree with this position and say that even if such a political movement is formed, then, due to absolute incompatibility and different interests, it will very quickly fall into two separate blocks, that is, the extreme left and the extreme right.

On the other hand, in France there are two rather powerful political forces, the two poles of mass mobilization, which are capable of presenting themselves with some justification as an alternative to the existing order of things – the RN-Rassemblement National (formerly National Front) on the right, and Unconquered France (LFI – La France Insoumise) Jean-Luc Melenchon – on the left. Both RN and LFI vigorously expressed support for the “yellow vests”. Nor can it be ruled out that the protest vote will be distributed between them, and that in some, not very distant future, Marine Le Pen and Jean-Luc Melenchon will meet in the second round of the presidential election, or their successors [10].

Thus, it is impossible not to admit, that quite a lot of unsolved problems have now accumulated in France, which have led to street protests. However, some immaturity of requirements is also obvious. Of course, the French government will have to make a lot of efforts to stabilize the situation in the country and review its domestic and foreign policy to meet the demands of the people. The development of events in the future can, of course, be assumed, but what the protest movement of the “yellow vests”, which acquires the features of a real revolution, will eventually lead only time can show.

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