



Written by [James Murphy](#) on December 5, 2018

## Macron Blinks in Face-off With “Yellow Vest” Protesters

Apparently, the Earth can wait half a year to be saved.

French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe announced yesterday that the new fuel tax imposed on French citizens, which [sparked nationwide protests](#) by the grassroots “Yellow Vest” movement, will be delayed for six months. A new tax increase was slated to begin on January 1 of 2019, less than a month from now.



Protests across France began on November 17 over the fuel tax —the first trigger for the protests. But the protests have become more about a wide-ranging feeling of dissatisfaction with the French government in general and President Emmanuel Macron in particular. [An Ifop poll](#) showed Macron’s approval ratings at just 25 percent, with disapproval at 73 percent. Prime Minister Philippe’s approval was 34 percent, according to the new poll.

On January 1, prices for gasoline were scheduled to go up by 2.9 cents per liter; diesel was scheduled to rise by 6.5 cents per liter. Philippe’s announcement pushes the tax increase back six months.

In his announcement, Philippe said that anyone would have to be “deaf and blind” to not hear or see the anger in France connected with the increased fuel taxes. He also hinted at possible concessions to middle- and lower-class French citizens, who were most affected by the taxes. Earlier, some ministers mentioned a possible minimum-wage increase, although Philippe did not discuss such a measure.

“The French who have donned yellow vests want taxes to drop, and work to pay. That’s also what we want. If I didn’t manage to explain it, if the ruling majority didn’t manage to convince the French, then something must change,” Philippe said.

“No tax is worth jeopardizing the unity of the nation,” the prime minister said.

While understanding that the nation wants taxes to be lowered, Philippe cautioned that such a move would result in fewer benefits for French citizens. “If the events of recent days have shown us one thing,” he declared, “it’s that the French want neither an increase in taxes or new taxes. If the tax take falls then spending must fall, because we don’t want to pass our debts on to our children. And those debts are already sizable.”

According to some in the Yellow Vest movement, the announcement is too little, too late. Protesters are not calling for the new fuel-tax hikes to be delayed, but repealed. Others won’t be satisfied until the Macron government is replaced.

A self-proclaimed leader of the leaderless movement, Thierry Paul Valette, told the Associated Press, “It’s coming too late.... I’m calling this government to resign.”

Some lawmakers have jumped into the conversation as well. “If your only response, Mr. Prime Minister, is the suspension of Macron’s fuel taxes, then you still haven’t realized the gravity of the situation,” Damian Abad of the center-right Les Republicains Party told Philippe. “What we are asking of you, Mr. Prime Minister, is not a postponement. It’s a change of course.”



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The “Yellow Vest” protesters, so named because of the bright vests that French motorists must carry in their vehicles in case of a roadside emergency, have grown quickly from their initial beginnings on social media only weeks ago. Except for opposition to the fuel taxes, the movement lacks a cohesive message. The movement also lacks leadership, which makes it difficult for the government to negotiate with them.

Both far-left and far-right groups have joined in the protests, muddling the situation even more. A certain criminal element that specializes in vandalism has also joined the protests. Last Saturday, upscale shopping districts and even the Arc de Triomphe were attacked, with the vandals breaking storefront windows and defacing the premises with graffiti. Cars were overturned and burned, while French police and gendarmes responded with water cannons and tear gas.

Macron, an ardent climate alarmist, has defended the new fuel-tax hikes as necessary to combat global warming. Perhaps that is why Phillipe made the announcement to delay the tax hike instead of Macron. The French president has yet to comment publicly on the delay of implementing the next round of fuel-tax increases.

The delay in the fuel tax certainly comes at an inconvenient time for Macron, who is set to attend the [U.N.'s climate-change conference](#) in Katowice, Poland, this coming week.

Though the situation in France is complicated, one thing seems clear. The fight against so-called climate change at the governmental level will run into a brick wall when it begins to affect the pocketbooks of the ordinary citizens of any nation.

*Photo: AP Images*



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