



Gilet Jaunes return to the streets!

Paul Chartrand reports from Paris

Paris streets had a whiff of tear gas and the echo of police sirens last Saturday, as thousands of protestors wearing their iconic fluorescent yellow vests returned to many cities across France to remind the government and their fellow citizens that they are not going away, soon after the one year anniversary of their first nationwide demonstrations. Initially reacting to an increased diesel tax scheduled for Jan, 2019, thousands of diverse groups took to the streets last year to protest a government that no longer seems to speak for the people, except perhaps the wealthy ones.

I had heard that one march might end near an afternoon Christmas fair I attended at Porte de Versailles on the western edge of Paris, but I didn't expect to end up in the middle ground between police and protests when I left a small Lebanese restaurant after lunch. Several heavily armored riot police had come in to use the toilet or buy a coffee, so I knew things were brewing outside. One of the policemen got into a mildly heated debate with a female customer about "the people", but it ended with smiles and the french equivalent of "Have a good day!" The police, too, have their union which has been part of recent strikes against retirement reform.

The streets were totally filled with police vehicles and personnel when I stepped outside, and the tram I expected to take home was now closed for the rest of the day. Nationwide union strikes had already crippled many public transports last week so I had few options beyond a long walk to a bus or tram stop. I stayed and watched the action while grabbing a few photos. Signs and shouts declared a variety of anti capitalist and anti government sentiments. Some protestors stayed behind a police line, while others crossed it individually and watched with me from the other side. Trash cans and an old car had been set afire before I came out, so a mix of smoke and tear gas permeated the dimming afternoon light.

This turned out to be the end of a long march so things were wrapping up for the day, but a group of Gilet Jaunes headed in a new direction to block another intersection, while police vans and sirens approached to head them off. I walked less than a mile to a tram stop I hoped might be functioning. It was not, but an elderly woman there told me the best way into the city might be one of the still functioning buses that passed nearby.

I took her advice and ended up sitting next to her on that crowded bus, filled with protestors and others going about their Saturday afternoon. We agreed that this ride across the city was a fine opportunity to appreciate its beauty in the fading winter sunlight, as Christmas decorations blinked on and evening began. We traded stories of why we each had ended up so far from home on a day when public transport was already almost non-existent due to ongoing union strikes against government retirement reform. She had gone to see a friend who had "little time left", at the hospital. I had gone to the Christmas fair to see a few wine producers I know. We both would make it home before the 6:30pm cutoff time for most city transit last weekend.

Her attitude reflected that of many Parisiens. They support and live with the protests because very few are happy with President Macron's domestic cost saving efforts. Everyone faces retirement and everyone wants the best one they can get. Can such a large, complex system be reformed and still reflect economic justice? Let's hope so. But not without public pressure.

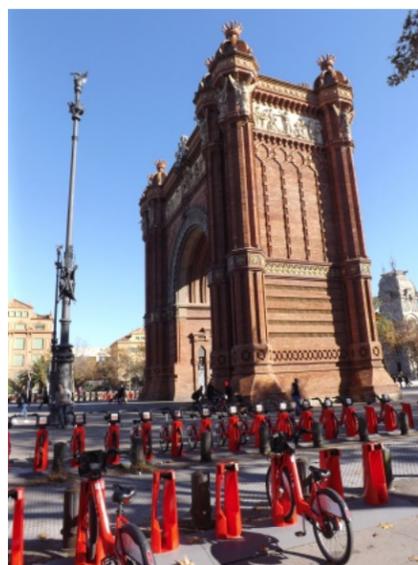
French people have always taken to the streets to express their pleasures and their protests; they value that aspect of their political culture and will not give it up for the sake of convenience. Ongoing union led strikes will continue here for days or weeks, depending on government response and public support. The Gilets Jaunes will return another Saturday. Merchants complain about reduced holiday sales and we all love to complain about the lack of buses and trains, but all that is almost cheerfully accepted as the price of democracy.



Coastal Opportunities Open House

by Ron Tesler

The Coastal Opportunities open house was held on Dec 7. There was a nice crowd in attendance for the grand opening ribbon cutting ceremony. Located at 190 Limerock Street in Rockland the facility is an assisted living group home for eight wheelchair bound residents. Modern and welcoming it is a very nice addition to our community.



Barcelona

Glen Birbeck reports from Catalonia

In Barcelona the new and the old are often neighbors. Bike rental via phone app and the monumental Arc re Triumph. A perfect illustration of this city's creative energy.

With my daughter I walked to the Sagrada Familia church and much to my surprise encountered Ecuadorian expats.

They were demonstrating against the current government in Quito. When I told them I was ten years a resident of Ecuador they handed me a sign. It's a small world and much of it is protesting something.



The Midcoast by Samuel Nash

Heaving stones carved like birchwood in decay
The perfect throne for lichens and lonely souls
No matter where you stand the sun will surely find you
Fanning like seagrass to god
A reminder that you too will join them someday
Eroded to wave or wind
Skin scarred and color wizened
Often you shall be another's pausing place
A lighthouse at the edge of the soup
Be careful, you'll say, or you might fall in
Though the salt has taken much from you already
Something for each moment held in tension
Interest payments on a debt inescapable
Some say it can be shielded, for awhile
With breakwaters and raincoats and mortgages
But what soul has the rock buried beneath the hill?
It has only waiting
The great black before
Only when it is exposed to churning death does it truly live
And if there's one art that captures this it's sculpture
Form found in the taking away
Sediment we must return to
Until then I'll be here, at the edge
Ecstatically decaying.

free and open to everyone.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 13:

- “Ahab’s Rolling Sea: A Natural History of Moby-Dick,” 6:30 p.m. at Maine Coastal Islands National Wildlife Refuge’s Visitor Center, 9 Water Street, Rockland. Richard King on his new book that looks at Melville’s novel of 1851 and today’s rising sea levels, and casts Ahab as Big Oil and Ishmael as a climate refugee. Lauded by The American Scholar journal.
- “It’s a Wonderful Life,” 6:30 p.m. in Thomaston Public Library. Frank Capra’s adaptation of “The Greatest Gift” stars Jimmy Stewart as George Bailey, a good man who’s spent a lifetime giving up on his dreams in order to keep life in his small town humming. When a guardian angel finds George poised to jump off a bridge, he shows him what life would’ve been like had he never been born. Nominated for five Oscars.
- Holiday Pop-Up at Steel House North, 711 Main Street, Rockland, runs Wednesday through Sunday, December 11 through 15, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Work by 29 midcoast artists ranges from ceramics, to jewelry to letterpress cards and handmade books. An artists’ reception will be held from 5 to 7 p.m.
- Open House at Harbor Square Gallery, 374 Main Street, Rockland, from 5 to 7 pm
- Friday Open Mics, in Warren, Saint George River Cafe, 310 Main Street, second and fourth Fridays, at 6:30 p.m.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 14:

- Winter Wassail Solstice Party at Merryspring Nature Center, Camden, from 2 to 5 p.m. All ages are invited for chestnuts roasting and hot wassail celebrating the apple harvest. Highland Mary Morris dancers at 2:30 p.m. and then the Mill Street Singers will sing carols.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 15:

- Sunday Jams in Rockland, Sail, Power, & Steam Museum, 75 Mechanic Street, 1:30 p.m.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 16:

- Free Adult Art Classes at Rockland Public Library, 11 a.m. Catinka Knoth leads the free Monday classes – with a focus on drawing in color – open to all, with materials provided. Students will draw woodland animals, wild turkeys, and Native American motifs this month.
- “Icebreakers, Zodiacs and Elephant Seals: The Tools and Trials of an Antarctic Marine Technician,” 6 p.m. at The Apprenticeshop, 655 Main Street, Rockland. Joee Patterson on her nine Antarctic expeditions as a marine technician supporting scientists who study the continent. She’ll share stories about life on an icebreaker, describe studies done by U.S. Antarctic Program scientists, and tell of her close encounters with wildlife.
- Camden Hills Regional High School’s Annual Holiday Concert, Rockport, 7 p.m. The jazz and concert bands, chorale, women’s choir and chamber singers perform in Strom Auditorium after a 5 p.m. Empty Bowl supper in the school’s Wave Cafe. The concert will end with a sing-along of popular carols. Bring a donation for the food pantry.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 17:

- Community “Messiah” Sing in Thomaston, 7:30 p.m. at Episcopal Church of St. John Baptist, 200 Main Street. Down East Singers, with Anthony Antolini conducting. Mozart Mentors Orchestra and keyboardist Sean Fleming. Singers interested in performing the Christmas section and “Hallelujah Chorus” of Handel’s 1741 “Messiah” are invited to take part. Scores will be available. Nonsingers are invited to come and listen. Donations. FMI: 832-1775.
- Tuesday Jams in Thomaston, Federated Church, 8 Hyler Street, at 7 p.m. Folk, country, blues, gospel. FMI: 273-2914.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 18:

- Warren Free Public Library, offers adult coloring Wednesdays at noon, and knitting every Friday from 10 a.m. to noon and first Thursdays from 6 to 7 p.m.
- Rockland Public Library STEM Workshop: Snow Day Science at 3:45 p.m. Create a snowstorm in a jar, go “ice” fishing, learn how blubber keeps creatures warm, and make a snowball launcher. All ages are welcome. Kids under 10 must be with an adult.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 19:

- Oceanside Choirs Sing at Rockland Public Library, at 6:30 p.m. The open concert choir and auditioned chamber choir of Oceanside High School give a short, free concert with the theme “positivity.” Then teacher Lauren Casey leads a sing-along.
- Thursday Jams in Warren, Saint George River Cafe, 310 Main Street, 6 p.m. and Friday Open Mics, second and fourth Fridays, at 6:30 p.m.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 21:

- Bird Lovers Asked to Take Part in Midcoast Christmas Bird Counts. Watch birds at your home feeders if you live within a designated area or join a team to go into the field. To sign up for for Rockland-Thomaston next Saturday, December 21, call Don Reimer at 273-3146. FMI: Midcoast.MaineAudubon.org.
- Rockport’s 7th Annual Holiday on the Harbor, Saturday, December 14, from 3 to 8 p.m. Music and art with a fireworks finish in the village, and from 4 to 6 p.m. at Union Hall, 24 Central Street, free performances by the Suzuki Twinklers, Bay Chamber Jazz Ensemble and Odeon Allegro Ensemble, served with cookies and cider.

Around Town is compiled by C.O.H.Gifford, Jr.
 An expanded listing is online at wrfr.org
 Please submit calendar items to gowrfr@gmail.com
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Metro Show on Homelessness

This week on WRFR's Rockland Metro show we were joined by Becca Gildred and Molly Feeney of the Knox County Homeless Coalition and had a serious discussion on homelessness in Rockland.

Did you tune in?

Next Wednesday from 5-6 pm on 93.3 fm in Rockland, 99.3 fm in Camden, you get another chance, on a related topic: Our guest will be Liz Jenkins, President of the Board of the Area Interfaith Outreach, supporting those in need in Knox County with food and energy assistance.



Trumped up charges

An Opinion by Stephen Carroll

As America’s longest-running daytime docudrama enters its third season, the question everyone is asking: can I hold on till the end. With a fabulous cast of characters including Nancy Pelosi, Adam Schiff and Chuck Schumer, this is all the rage at the water cooler. My favorite, Donald Trump, playing the villain, seems to have stolen the show. Viewers want to know what he’ll do to foil the Dems.

Who will win in the end? My money’s on Trump. Did you get to see yesterday’s show? Grandma Pelosi shaking her fist definitely at the reporter asking “do you hate Trump?” “I don’t hate anyone,” she snarls, holding her rosary and quoting passages from James Madison and Ben Franklin. Meanwhile, Adam Schiff discloses the newest “bombshell” as he has found yet another witness to seal the case. This testimony will focus on a feeling the witness had after overhearing a portion of a phone conversation while waiting in line at the train station. Schiff slams the gavel and declares in a loud voice “ the walls are closing in”. On the other side of the Capitol building, Chuck Schumer after speaking with Rachel Maddow proclaims he’s uncovered evidence they’re “all Russian plants”. I just wish I could stay for the next thrilling episode on MSNBC, but they have shut off my cable and are repossessing my home. You see, a new t-series cyborg has taken my job at the Amazon warehouse and now I will join the homeless population in America. Do not fear because the Democrats have promised they will help me get my job back just as soon as they impeach that “son of a B...”. The good news, I still have my radio so I can listen to the new song sweeping the country. A top 10 hit with most Americans. It’s called “what have you done for me lately”.

Merry Christmas & Happy Holidays

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