

France: Sans papiers continue occupation of CGT union hall

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The occupation by *sans papiers* (undocumented workers) of the CGT (General Confederation of Labour) building, the *Bourse du travail*, in the 3rd arrondissement of Paris, is now over one month old. Organised by the Paris *Coordination de sans papiers 75* (CSP75), the premises have been occupied day and night since May 2. The occupiers are demanding that the union, closely allied to the Stalinist Communist Party, take up their file of 1,000 applications from immigrant workers seeking legal residence rights.

On Monday evening June 2, representatives of CSP75 met with a joint union committee, *Intersyndicale*, made up of CGT and other involved unions' representatives. CSP75 spokesman Anzoumane Sissoko told the WWS that the meeting had set up a commission to work on the *Coordination's* demands. He said that the occupation would continue until their demands were met. That is: a meeting of CSP75 representatives, supported by the unions, with the government, and the legalisation of all 1,000 of their applicants.

On April 15, the CGT had launched a series of strikes and occupations of workplaces for the legalisation of *sans papiers* union members, many of them working in hotels and restaurants as well as on building sites and in cleaning enterprises, mostly in collaboration with employers who need their labour. At the same time, the union submitted to the Paris prefecture a file of 900 applications of its members for legal residence.

The CSP75, which numbers some 2,000 members in Paris, then tried to submit its own file of applications and was told by the Paris prefecture that they had to go through the CGT. When CSP75 asked the CGT to take up their case, the union would not do so. The Paris region CGT official Christian Khalifa told LCI TV channel on May 8: "The CGT can't take up all the applications for legalisation of the *sans papiers*. We are a trade union organisation, not a *sans papiers* association."

Mamoudou Dialo, a prominent member of CSP75 told *La Croix* May 22: "We're asking the government for us to be able at least to submit our applications at the prefectures. It's not fair that the trade unions can do it and that we, who represent the most isolated workers, should be excluded. If need be, we'll stay for months, years here."

The CSP 75 rejected the deal between the CGT and the French state, which excludes the mass of undocumented immigrants, while making the CGT the only recognised intermediary for the *sans papiers*. The CSP75's May 15 statement said: "CSP 75 cannot accept the exclusive role, which appears to have been granted to the CGT, of filing applications collectively at the *préfectures* of the Paris region" and stressed that their movement represents a struggle "against the destruction of labour rights and workers' rights" in general.

It continued: "We demand the legalisation of all *sans papier* workers, male and female, refugees and unemployed, and to be received by Mr Hortefeux (Minister of Immigration) and Mr Gaudin (Paris chief of police) with the support of the CGT, the closure of retention centres [for immigrants with expulsion orders pending deportation], the repeal of the xenophobic immigration laws, and an end to round-ups and police checks

based on skin colour, the repeal of the discriminatory and illegal ANAEM tax paid [by employers] for the employment of every foreigner!"

Interviewed at the *Bourse du travail* last week, CSP75 spokesman Djibril Diaby told the WWS: "Right now we have a lot of support. Night and day we get supporters who defend us and the cause of the *sans papiers*, the legalisation of the *sans papiers*. We survive with donations from the support organisations and from people of good will and with collections made by the *sans papiers*."

He added that there were other *sans papiers* coordinating committees which carry out similar struggles: "In [department] 92, they have occupied a church...Yesterday in Montreuil, the *sans papiers* collectives occupied other places, so there are other initiatives going on."

Diaby also pointed out that *sans papiers* from other departments were coming there with their applications: "Here, we have *sans papiers* from the entire Paris region. So we have *sans papiers* from 92, 93, 91. Since we occupied on May 2, every day new people come to see us. This is the 25th day of our occupation. So the fight is just starting. Because as long as our demand is not satisfied, we will stay here."

He insisted: "For us, all *sans papiers* do work. All those who do not work with their cousins' documents, they work clandestinely (*au noir*) to survive, even though they work for meagre salaries. The CGT and the CFDT are trade unions and their demands are trade union demands. We are defenders of the *sans papiers*."

Asked why the CGT was not taking charge of their files, he said: "When they set up the strike pickets April 15, the CGT told us to wait. But, as you have seen, the *sans papiers* are impatient. They can't wait any longer. Those whose employers agree to give work certificates with promises to employ - we too have taken up their applications so as to go and submit them at the *préfecture*. Well we can't wait any more because we are under pressure from these people." Djibril indicated the group of *sans papiers* listening the interview. "That is why we decided to take matters into our own hands."

He affirmed that case-by-case processing is no solution. "The only solution, the right solution today, is massive legalisation." General? "General, global - of all the *sans papiers* who have settled into French society and who want to stay here. Those people

have the right to be legalised because they want to live decently, like other French citizens."

Asked whether it was possible to win by trade union methods, Diaby said: "Our struggle and the trade union method are different. Because it's 11 years now that we've been in this struggle. The CGT has only been in this struggle for 5 or 6 months."

The WWS pointed out: "It seems that the unions and the civil rights organisations accept case-by-case processing but President Sarkozy and [Minister of Immigration, Brice] Hortefeux have shut the door because they've said 'you have to have a work certificate', so it means being accepted by a boss. That's a tremendous limitation."

Diaby replied: "We are well aware of the government's position. Case-

by-case is in the hands of the boss and the government. The government says that to legalise all *sans papiers* is an invitation to others (*un appel d'air*), while the employers say that they should be massively legalised in order to keep the workforce. Otherwise there are some firms, some factories, in danger of closing down for lack of workers. Mr Hortefeux's new June law says that every employer must now send to the prefecture a photocopy of the residence permit of any person he wishes to employ. It's the police now who will be checking if the permit is valid or not. That's why the bosses have said people should be massively legalised, otherwise, if we are told that all those people are going to be sacked and there are closures in France, that's not in the interests of the French economy."

We must take issue with Diaby when he appeals to the government on the basis that the *sans papiers* workers are necessary to the national economy. They are only necessary in as much as they are exploitable; this is the whole point of "selective immigration." Otherwise they are utterly expendable, and the government recognises no rights for them.

The pressure of globalised competition between the great powers on the world market, exacerbated by the current credit crisis and the massive inflation of food and energy prices, drives the bosses to carry out the destruction of the rights and living standards of all workers. The brutalisation of relationships between the state and workers is most severely felt by the most vulnerable sections of the working class, notably the *sans papiers*.

French and European imperialism, represented by both conservative and "left" governments, in relation to immigration, need a cheap and submissive labour force without rights. Sarkozy's policy of restricting immigration to workers who are required by French capitalists, known as *immigration choisie* (selected immigration) as opposed to *immigration subie* (endured immigration), represents the intensification of years of ever-tightening restrictions, which have created hundreds of thousands of illegal immigrants without papers, *sans papiers*.

Caught between global competition and the resistance of the working class and the youth to its austerity policies, the French bourgeoisie is renouncing all semblance of adherence to the traditions of the universal recognition of human rights, dating from the French Revolution of 1789. It is taking the lead in Europe in the destruction of these rights.

President Nicolas Sarkozy is at present canvassing the 27 member states of the European Union to adopt a "European Pact for Immigration" which would massively increase the deployment of militarised forces to block would-be immigrants both at the borders of "Fortress Europe" and in the transit countries. It would beef up the already draconian conditions for obtaining residence rights throughout the EU and intensify the on-going constant massive police sweeps and deportations of immigrants. It has the support of the entire European political class, the conservative parties and the political and trade union left.

Support organisations such as RESF (Education Without Borders Network) are finding that humanitarian appeals to the authorities for clemency for sick immigrants, pregnant mothers, parents with babies and young children fall increasingly on deaf ears as the state withdraws finance from social services which provide aid to refugees and other immigrants in difficulty.

The WSWs completely supports the action of the *sans papiers* and their demand that the unions should take up their case. We call on French workers and youth to come to the aid of the *sans papiers*.

However, we are bound to warn that the perspective expressed by Djibril Diaby in the interview with the WSWs is profoundly mistaken. He said: said that "Unity is needed to push the government and the employers to legalise." He also told the WSWs: "to try to force this government to back down, we are asking all the unions, all the *sans papiers* collectives to unite and to put pressure on the government and the employers."

No confidence can be placed in the trade unions to carry out a fight against the government. The CGT's agreement to submit only their own

members' applications serves to divide and contain the *sans papiers* movement. Hortefeux has repeatedly asserted that only "a few hundred will be legalised" so, we can assume that many CGT members' applications will be thrown out.

The unions are no longer in any way defenders of the working class but direct agents of the capitalist class, pro-capitalist organisations like their political allies in the Socialist Party (PS) and French Communist Party (PCF). They do not pressurise the government and the employers: they pressure the working class to accept the "reforms" necessary to enable big business to compete. Their main concern is to defend the national economy, that is French capitalism, against its rivals and, by extension, against their rivals' working class. This is why the CGT and the CFDT isolated and stifled the struggles of the railway workers, the teachers, public service workers and the university and high school students. They have recently signed an agreement with the bosses and the government which destroys the 35-hour week and deregulates working conditions.

This is why they cannot defend the basic democratic rights of immigrant workers.

In the interview with Diaby, the WSWs reminded him that right from the start of CSP75's occupation of the CGT building, the LCR (Ligue Communiste révolutionnaire) of Olivier Besancenot condemned the action. Its weekly *Rouge* attacked: "the damaging occupation of the Paris Union Hall by *Coordination 75*" and accused it of being responsible for "the poison of division." A statement on the LCR web site entitled "The *sans-papiers* movement: the LCR's position" implies that *Coordination 75*'s action is helping the government: "The government has perhaps found a way of dividing and neutralising the movement."

Diaby's reply, although expressing a certain bitterness and perhaps irony, nevertheless, left the CGT and the LCR's cynical opportunism largely unchallenged: "But I can tell you that now we have a good understanding with the CGT. So, for their strike pickets, *Coordination 75* is going to go round them to give support to the striking *sans papiers*. So, for us a *sans papiers* is a *sans papiers*. We support all of them."

What it is necessary to understand is that it is no accident that the LCR came out so viciously in support of the CGT against the CSP75 occupation. The LCR's role for the 40 years of its existence has been to tell workers that they do not need to build a party independent of all the props of capitalism such as the PS, the PCF, and the unions. The crisis of the official left in France means that Olivier Besancenot and the LCR are being groomed by the media to take the place of the SP and the CP and to work with the CGT to build their new bogus "anti-capitalist party".

The unity of these organisations is a bureaucratic unity against workers in struggle in order to prevent them from uniting. The democratic and social rights of all can be defended only through a complete break from these agencies, on the basis of the unity of the working class itself. This involves the building of action committees of workers from all sectors coming to the aid of those under attack and developing a programme of the social and democratic ownership of the economy.

It means overthrowing the present bourgeois regime and establishing a workers' government based on the mass movement of the working class and establishing a political unity with workers in all countries against the global attacks on their means of existence, whether they be economic and social, or neo-colonial, as in Iraq and Afghanistan.

For this it is necessary to build a new international socialist movement, the task that the WSWs has set itself. We invite all workers and youth to participate in this fight.



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