

France: Union thugs threaten immigrants at a Communist Party fair

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Members of the *Coordination des sans Papiers* 75 (CSP75), which organises some 2,000 undocumented workers and their families in Paris, are reported to have been told by CGT (General Confederation of Labour, close to the Communist Party) officials that they would do all in their power to prevent their applications for legal residence from being granted.

CGT stewards are also reported to have committed acts of aggression against CSP75 representatives at the annual fair of the CP daily, the *Fête de l'Humanité*.

Several hundred CSP75 *sans-papiers* have been occupying the CGT union hall and offices, *La Bourse du travail*, in central Paris since May 2, in protest against the CGT's refusal to take up the fight for their applications for legal residence with the French authorities.

CSP75 had expected to be involved in the campaign of strikes and work-place occupations organised by the CGT in April 2008 to press for legal residence for *sans-papiers* workers, most of which were supported by employers who required their labour. But they were rebuffed by the trade union. When the CSP75 approached the Paris *Préfecture* with some 1,000 applications, they were told that all applications should be forwarded through the CGT, leaving them in an impasse. This prompted the occupation of the *Bourse du travail*.

The response of the CGT was to declare that no aid such as food and medicine should be delivered to those involved in the occupation, which included mothers, children and sick people. The CGT's instruction was adhered to by all the various humanitarian, immigrant and anti-racist organisations until May 21, when a joint trade union committee backed by the aid organisations was set up to attempt to negotiate the evacuation of the

CGT's premises.

When the joint committee agreed to accompany the CSP75 delegates to meetings with the authorities, the CSP75 responded by allowing the CGT to reoccupy some of their offices.

The *Quotidien des sans-papiers* (Undocumented Workers' Daily), a website based in Paris which supports the *sans-papiers*, posted a statement by CSP75 September 18 reporting that their organisation had been invited by a Bolivian group at the *Fête de l'Humanité* to share their stand—"as a gesture of solidarity with our just demands for legal residential status" and as a sign of "opposition to the recent European measure against immigrants known as 'the European directive of shame.'"

The article explained:

"In the afternoon of Friday 12 [September], a dozen ' heavies ' from the CGT security force (acting as 'security guards' at the fair as they stated to the person in charge of the stand) suddenly surrounded the four representatives of CSP75 who were there. They tore up leaflets and threw post cards of the occupation to the ground, tried to turn over the press table despite the opposition of our comrades, and they prevented them, by physical force and verbal threats, from filming the scene. They told our comrades that they were going to occupy the stand in response to our occupation of the 'Bourse du travail'; they loudly declared that, because of this, the CSP75 *sans-papiers* 'would get nothing' as far as legalisation was concerned."

The CSP75 statement continued: "It was only after a series of phone calls to the CGT representative of the Paris region, who was there, that the dozen 'CGT members' left the stand, and it was only after the alert launched by the CSP75 to perhaps reroute our demonstration due the next day in Paris to the *Fête de*

l'Humanité that we were assured that ‘everything was now in order.’”

When five CSP75 members later went to the Paris Préfecture to arrange their legal work status as previously agreed, they were told that all legalisation appointments had been postponed until October 20 and 21, despite the fact that they had been assured that their applications “had no problems.”

Suspicious of the CSP75 that there was a link between this action and the statements of the CGT thugs at the *Fête de l'Humanité* were soon confirmed. On the morning of September 17, a CSP75 delegation went to give support, “as we habitually do in such cases,” to the occupation organised by the CGT of the *La Tour d'Argent* restaurant in the 5th arrondissement by five *sans-papiers* workers requesting legalisation.

The organisation comments:

“Here is what we were told by the Paris region CGT official: “You are barking up the wrong tree, we will do everything we can to block your applications. I spoke to the director of the Paris police *prefecture*, while you are at the *Bourse du travail* you won't get your legalisations.”

The CSP75 statement then asks: “Has the CGT become the French state then? Is it the CGT that decides on the legalisation of the *sans-papiers*?”

It is clear that with the events at *La Fête de l'Humanité*, the CGT have revealed themselves to be the direct agents of the Sarkozy government and Immigration Minister Brice Hortefeux.

It should be recalled that when CSP75 occupied the *Bourse du travail*, the *Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire* (LCR) of Olivier Besancenot, which seeks the support of CGT bureaucrats in the process of launching their new “Anti-Capitalist Party,” came out in defence of the union. The LCR spoke of “the damaging occupation of the Paris Union Hall by *Coordination 75*” and accused it of being responsible for “the poison of division.”



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