

Guadeloupe: Striker killed in repression of general strike

Sarkozy government sends 300 police reinforcements

Antoine Lerougetel
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The government of President Nicolas Sarkozy has responded to the general strike in Guadeloupe by escalating the repression that resulted in the death of striker Jacques Bino on Tuesday night. On Wednesday, it sent 300 police reinforcements to the island.

When Sarkozy made his national address on TV on Thursday evening, presenting his plan for the social crisis in France as a result of the economic crisis, he failed to refer to Jacques Bino. He reserved any proposals for a solution to the general strikes taking place in France's West Indian possessions from January 20 in Guadeloupe and February 5 in Martinique until the following day, after meeting with political representatives from the islands.

The central demand of the general strike, a monthly wage rise of €200 for the 45,000 poorest workers of Guadeloupe, also taken up by the Martinique movement, has met with a categorical refusal by the government.

The response of the French left and the trade unions has been to avoid any specific support for this demand, to prevent the struggle in Guadeloupe and Martinique from linking up with resistance by workers in metropolitan France.

Jacques Bino, a 50-year-old trade unionist, a member of the CGTG (General Confederation of Labour of Guadeloupe, the main trade union), was a representative of the LKP (United Against the Profiteers), which is leading the mass movement in Guadeloupe. He was shot while negotiating a roadblock mounted by residents of a deprived housing estate.

Jean-Marie Nomertin, the general secretary of the CGTG and also a leading member of the LKP, told RFO Radio, "We reaffirm our mobilisation, and we say more than ever that the state and the bosses bear the full responsibility for the death today of Jacques Bino and the other militants who have been arrested and the repression more broadly."

Nomertin continued, "According to our information, it's the youth who first made a call [for help]. The police were called. The police refused to come, saying that there were three wounded on their side and that they preferred to stay and look after their people. Then the ambulance service and the fire brigade were ready to come, but with police permission. The police decided to simply say that they had three wounded people. Meanwhile, our comrade was losing blood and dying."

Mediapart published a letter February 18 sent from the hospital bed of Alex Lollia, a philosophy teacher and a member of LKP, recounting his experiences of police violence and racism on the night of February 16.

The letter said Lollia and his trade union comrades "were doing everything in our power to keep things calm and to steward the demonstrators.... [W]e experienced a tornado of baton blows when we had already left the side of the main road.... They surrounded me.... While I was being kicked in the stomach as I lay on the ground they said, 'We saw your filthy face on the telly, we'll smash it for you so you can't show it anymore. We'll smash you filthy niggers, nigger dogs.' "

The letter continued, "I saw them dragging a woman from the neighbourhood by the hair who was showing her indignation because they beat me."

The police report for Wednesday night recorded 15 businesses pillaged, 7 buildings burned, 21 vehicles torched, 13 arrests and 60 interventions by the fire brigade and the use of firearms against them. The ruling UMP (Union for a Popular Movement) has accused the LKP of responsibility for allowing the movement to "get out of hand."

This is refuted by strike leader Elie Demota, leader of the CGTG and main spokesman for the LKP. He told *France Inter* radio, "For 30 days we were totally in control of the movement and the *préfet* [police chief] sent in the gendarmes who beat the demonstrator in front of the TV cameras. That's how it all started."

Already on February 9, Prime Minister François Fillon made it clear that the government categorically refused to finance the €200-per-month demand, saying it was a question for the bosses and unions to negotiate. The previous day, he had recalled Yves Jégo, minister of state for the overseas possessions, from negotiations with the LKP and the Guadeloupe employers when he appeared to be conceding the €200 pay rise. Jégo then declared, "We will impose respect for the rule of law if need be. With firmness, but without brutality."

The resort to repression has been facilitated by the French trade unions and left parties' lack of any solidarity action or clear support for the demands of the Guadeloupe masses. It was a full 27 days after the start of the movement that the first demonstration in solidarity took place in Paris, on Monday, February 16. None have called for the national day of action scheduled for March 19—the sequel to January 29 when more than 3 million workers and youth struck and demonstrated in defence of the social services against the government's austerity programme—to link up with the Caribbean struggle.

The Socialist Party majority on the Guadeloupe regional council has attempted to weaken the resolve of the strikers with insulting sops, which they have rejected. *Libération* February 16 reports, "In order to attempt to find a way out of the situation, the presidents of the regional and the departmental councils, Victorin Lurel [SP] and Jacques Gillot [allied to the SP] made a joint appeal for 'a softening of the mobilisations' and laid a proposal on the table: the payment of a monthly special sum of 100 euros by their local government, for three months, for workers earning up

to 40 percent above the minimum wage. The LKP immediately rejected it, denouncing a 'misuse of social aid.' It called on the state to 'honour its promise' by agreeing to provide the 108 million euros necessary for the raising of the lowest wages, as had been agreed a week ago in a pre-agreement with Yves Jégo. But for fear that Guadeloupe could spread across the sea to metropolitan France, François Fillon and Nicolas Sarkozy said niet."

Le Monde commented that for Martine Aubry, first secretary of the SP, "it is out of the question to fan the flames of social discontent imprudently." It quoted her remarks to the press February 13: "I do indeed fear that the anger, the discontent of the people of Guadeloupe and Martinique could spread here.... The president of the Republic is deaf to the expectations of French people...and it's this gap which leads me to fear a propagation of the events stirring up the West Indies."

Another disservice to the Guadeloupe and French masses emanating from the Socialist Party leadership has been statements by Malik Boutih. He is the former leader of the SP-sponsored anti-racist organisation SOS Racisme and author of the SP policy document proposing immigration quotas. Boutih, who is presently being wooed by Sarkozy to join his administration, has attempted to reduce the conflict to race. He said that it was "shocking" to see a police force "almost 100 percent white, confront a black population." Which begs the question: Would it be any better if the police were black? They would still be acting at the behest of French imperialism.

Some of the leaders of the LKP have made statements stressing the race issue. Ninety percent of the wealth of the island is held by the families of the "békés," the former white slave owners. They control most of the large supermarkets, with franchises from the major French chains. Recent reports have shown that mark-ups for food and goods imported from abroad, attributed to transport costs, have been fraudulently inflated as have petrol costs by the Total subsidiary SARA, which has the monopoly on supplies to the French Caribbean possessions.

These practices are endemic to the drive for super-profits of capitalist globalisation and exacerbated by the deepening world economic crisis, and reach far beyond the French Caribbean. They affect workers all over the world, as well as in metropolitan France. A health worker from Guadeloupe, working in Paris, told the British *Observer*. "The people who profit are both sides, black and béké.... The békés are descendants of slave drivers who made their fortunes from our suffering. However, let me make it clear, that this racism is not the reason behind this current conflict. It's a revolt against misery. I don't know why it didn't come to this before."

The tendency of the LKP leadership to cast the struggle as a national and non-class issue is an element in the isolation of the movement from the French working class. They make no attempt to unify the struggles in Guadeloupe with those of workers across the Atlantic. A key element of their demand for a €200-per-month wage rise is an appeal for the French government to subsidise employers with exemptions from paying taxes and social security contributions.

After the social summit meeting on Wednesday of unions, employers and the government, Jean-Claude Mailly of *Force Ouvrière* (Workers Power) told *Europe 1* radio, "We should have been out of this conflict two weeks ago," if Yves Jégo's promised "reductions in social contributions for businesses had been kept."

Médiapart published statements from New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA) leaders in its February 17 postings, which displayed a desire to be seen as responsible members of the French Republic's political class and to dampen down the revolt. Jean-François Grond said of Oliver Besancenot's planned visit to the Guadeloupe and Martinique on Friday,

"It's not a question of throwing oil on the fire, but going and feeling the atmosphere." As for the "contagion" of revolt passing from the Caribbean to France, Grond denies that the NPA could have a part in it: "We have never indulged in the fantasies of the police point of view that mass movements can be set off by remote control. It's metropolitan France's society which will decide on that."

Alain Krivine, the founder member of the *Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire* (LCR), which has dissolved itself into the NPA, gave a display of the political cowardice and opportunism of his movement, explaining its tardiness in responding to the Guadeloupe struggle and sending a delegation there. He asserted that the delay was "in fact to wait and see if it was going to get big and so as not to be accused of taking it over.... [W]e'll be the last ones on the left to have gone there!... We're getting stick from our rank-and-file members asking us why we aren't there yet."

World Socialist Web Site reporters covered the Paris demonstration in solidarity with the Guadeloupe and Martinique movements last Monday evening called by the NPA and the Left Party of Jean-Luc Mélenchon and supported by the Communist Party and other left groups.

There were between 3,000 and 5,000 demonstrators, mainly French political activists with few West Indians present. There were banners and flags from the NPA, *Lutte Ouvrière*, the POI (Independent Workers Party, formerly the Workers Party of Pierre Lambert), and the Left Party. We saw no trade union banners.

The WSWS spoke to some Guadeloupean demonstrators.

René, a lorry driver, said things cost too much there. "I saw the news, things are getting bad. There have been arrests. The government does not want to give way. They must hold on to the end."

He said there was very little coverage in France of Guadeloupe. "They say straight up that blacks and whites are fighting each other out there. It's not like that at all. Everyone is out on the streets."

Pierrot teaches French. He said, "What's happening in the West Indies is very serious. It's too expensive. Even to study, eat, get lodging, find work is very difficult. People don't have a future. The media treat the French West Indies as a second-class zone.

"What we want first of all is that people's lives over there be guaranteed—security, jobs. Firstly, we are for the West Indies, and also for France. With the crisis, we are all affected. All our demands connect up. In fact, it's the same fight. It's a big disappointment. We thought the unions, the CGT, FO, the left parties, even the right-wing ones could have demonstrated."



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