

How France's ex-left betrays the undocumented workers' strike

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The April 17 rally for the *sans-papiers* [undocumented] immigrant workers' strike, at Town Hall Square in Paris, highlighted the political gulf between immigrant workers and the French political establishment. CGT trade unionists and Parti Socialiste (PS, the main bourgeois left party of government) members attended, with a large number of ex-left groups, including the Parti Communiste Français (PCF), the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (NPA, New Anticapitalist Party), and Lutte Ouvrière (LO, Workers' Struggle).

These forces, trailing behind the French establishment, view the *sans-papiers* with a mixture of fear and disenchantment. The potential for confrontation was shown in May 2008, when *sans-papiers* workers, whom the government had told to request papers from the CGT trade union, occupied the trade union hall in Paris' 3rd district (*arrondissement*) to demand prompt decisions. A CGT goon squad, working together with CRS riot police, broke into the building and expelled the *sans-papiers* last June.

The April 17 rally took place after *sans-papiers* groups demanded a show of support from the political parties. Several thousand *sans-papiers* workers have been on strike for nearly 7 months, demanding that they all be regularized (i.e., receive working papers).

The WSWS spoke with Qing, a *sans-papiers* worker representing Chinese workers, most of whom spoke little French. She said the strike was "very difficult, we've been on strike for over 6 months. Now, we're no longer picketing. There are 1,800 of us together, with workers from all countries, largely in the restaurant industry, 700 Chinese and the rest are Africans." She added, "Our bosses don't want to regularize us, maybe because we're Chinese. There is a

problem with the forms."

Many of the workers in Qing's group were wearing CGT badges or holding CGT flags. Asked if she was a CGT member, Qing said, "I'm not a CGT delegate; I'm a delegate for the Chinese. We are *sans-papiers*, we want our rights. We want all the unions, the associations to help us, and a regularization of the *sans-papiers*. The CGT is not important."

The WSWS also spoke to Sidibé Aliou, a worker at the trade-union Union Locale of Bobigny, a working-class suburb of Paris. Sidibé said the "goal of the struggle is that all *sans-papiers* be regularized...the trade unions must demand that all *sans-papiers* be regularized."

Asked if he thought a Socialist Party government would change the situation, Sidibé said, "The PS when it was in power did nothing for the *sans-papiers*. If the left comes back to power in 2012 [the date of the next presidential election], it would be just like 1987 or 2002. But conditions are much worse now." He noted that undocumented workers used to be able to pay into pension schemes and other state-run programs, but that had ended and a wave of arrests had hit the *sans-papiers*. He added, "Before, it was not like that. With the victory [of conservative presidential candidate Jacques] Chirac in 2002, and above all [current President Nicolas] Sarkozy, things have gotten worse and worse."

For the political parties in attendance, however, the *sans-papiers* struggle was a way to regularize a source of cheap labor, and unify their forces through a joint campaign. Sarkozy is now collapsing in the polls—65 percent of the public do not want him to stand for a second term in 2012—due in no small part to his racist campaign against the burqa and on "national identity," before last month's regional elections. The pseudo-left

broadly supported Sarkozy's anti-burqa campaign.

For these forces, promoting a bogus "anti-racist" image and building up political momentum around the PS to prepare its possible return to power are critical issues. So is keeping control of *sans-papiers* strikers to prevent a new confrontation between these workers and the unions. For those reasons, they are willing to cynically pose as friends of the *sans-papiers*, even though they do not support the *sans-papiers*' struggles and their demand for mass regularization.

The WSWS spoke to Rémi Feraud, the Parti Socialiste mayor of Paris' 10th *arrondissement*. Feraud said he aimed to "support the *sans-papiers*" though "in the short term, one can't expect much. But we don't despair." Asked what the PS wanted to do for *sans-papiers*, he said, "If the PS comes back to power in 2012, immigration criteria would evolve, not in such a way as to regularize all the *sans-papiers*, but some of them." He added, "France has always been a country of immigrants, we cannot leave them in a precarious status. The economy needs their labor."

Asked if he thought the PS would benefit from the support of other parties who were attending the rally, Feraud replied, "Yes, the PS will benefit from the unity of the left in 2012."

The WSWS also spoke to Jean-Louis Gaillard of Lutte Ouvrière (LO). He pointed out that "a section of the bosses—from temp agencies, construction, and maintenance—support [the *sans-papiers*]." He denounced Sarkozy's opposition to regularizing the *sans-papiers* as "political, not economic"—that is, improperly based on Sarkozy's political appeal to neo-fascist sentiment, as opposed to the labor needs of French businesses.

Speaking of the *sans-papiers* struggle, Gaillard praised the "struggle of the CGT, the role of the CGT is very good."

When the WSWS asked Gaillard what he thought of the CGT's collaboration with the CRS to attack the *sans-papiers* last year, he wholeheartedly defended it. Speaking of the *sans-papiers*, he said, "Some of them were saying that cases weren't going ahead because of the CGT. They were wrong—the CGT was trying to help them." After the *sans-papiers* occupied the trade union hall, Gaillard said, "[T]he unions sort of pushed them a bit. Come on, [the CGT] asked them to leave 10 times."

He suggested that, in a similar situation, he would

also consider using the CRS against the *sans-papiers*: "It's true that it looks a bit funny. But if they occupied LO's offices, I don't know how things would go."



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