

# An exchange of letters on the CGT union's role in France's anti-worker port reform

4 May 2011

*The WSWS received the following email from a union executive of the CGT-Ports and Docks, criticizing the WSWS's analysis of the recent port reform approved by the CGT, the state, and the bosses. (See: CGT union defends anti-worker reform of French ports). The WSWS is publishing this letter, together with a response by the article's author, Anthony Torres.*

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What a cunning manipulation of words and ideas! Congratulations for your formulations and your use of your sources but also for your preconceptions, but it's a pity that does not make for social progress. Of course it's easy to make criticisms all over the place, but lefties like you bring nothing to the working class.

On the contrary, your fatalism may be interpreted as allied with capitalism and the people we're fighting. But to fight does not just mean criticism and doing nothing, it must be active, a force for making proposals like we've been doing on the ports for decades.

I don't know what your sources are, but what is sure is that the port workers have confidence in their CGT union and the social advances and salary rises etc..., won sometimes in struggle and at others through dialogue, result in our unity being the guarantee of our effectiveness.

We don't reply to people like you who try to discriminate against us but today just for fun I'm replying, which I know will be of no help to you because I suppose that, like many "lefties" like you, you will keep on criticizing without proposing any solutions.

We workers, maintenance and administrative staff on the ports constitute a unique force, and the "trade union bureaucrat" that I am is proud that all the port workers have improved conditions.

I hope you get the message,  
Serge Coutouris

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It would be a travesty to claim, as you do, that the CGT fights to improve port workers' conditions. The WSWS's analyses of the role of the trade unions are based on what the CGT itself publishes about its support for anti-worker reforms negotiated with the government and the bosses.

To get the reform accepted by the port workers, you negotiated a pension agreement—for dockers, crane operators and maintenance workers—that was a cut compared with what had been promised. This is because to defend your own interests, which are those of the state, you isolated the port workers from the broader struggle against the pension reforms, which the CGT's national leadership betrayed by insisting on negotiations with the state.

Mr. CGT bureaucrat, did you support the refinery workers who were attacked by the CRS riot police at the time of the strikes in October 2010 against the pension reform? The CGT never called for a broader struggle to defend those workers. This means that the CGT does not oppose the physical repression of workers by the state, if it thinks that this is necessary to get an anti-worker reform passed which was prepared and supported by the CGT.

By allowing the state to regain control of the refineries, you weakened the port workers and the working class as a whole. As for the hiring of 25 crane operators' sons as dockers, these are just crumbs.

Further on in your email you talk of unity, but, as we said in our article, the CGT split the port workers between Fos on the one side, and on the other Marseille. The CGT general secretary was pleased to be able to take trade from the port of Arles, which means that you were for making dockers at different ports compete.

Mr. Bureaucrat, in your email there was no answer to our criticisms. You present our organization as allies of the class enemy. This goes back to the old Stalinist method of branding those who criticize the bureaucracy as allies of capitalism.

In a period of the crisis of global capitalism, the French and international bourgeoisie are driven to attack the living standards of the working class. To do this they rely on the trade unions, which help them to impose their austerity programs on the working class.

Our article demonstrated that you are the allies of capitalism, not us. Only by breaking from the unions and the bourgeois left and building independent organizations to overthrow the Sarkozy government and set up a workers' state, can the workers defend themselves against the crisis of the system.

Without a mass organization fighting for these perspectives, which we intend to build, workers will be forced to accept a real social retrogression. Your role is to hide this reality with deceitful phrases about being "a force for making proposals," which you use when you are collaborating with the state's preparation of reactionary policies.

Anthony Torres



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