

French unions join far-right movement against refugees in Calais

Anthony Torres
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Cynically claiming it was defending jobs, the Stalinist General Confederation of Labor (CGT) union joined far right protests against the “Jungle” refugee camp last Monday in Calais. The union bureaucracy thus brought its support to neo-fascist anti-immigrant propaganda and to the Socialist Party (PS) government, which aims to dismantle the “Jungle” to divide the workers with nationalist hatreds and disorient their opposition to PS wars and austerity measures.

After several protests in northern France and in Paris, the “Great rally of the Calais region,” a self-proclaimed “apolitical citizens movement,” carried out an action on September 5, cutting off the A16 highway with trucks and tractors.

The protest brought together employers’ groups, neo-fascist unions and the CGT on an anti-immigrant basis. The Calais Federation of Enterprises and Businesses, far-right police unions, the national trucking association, farmers’ groups and the CGT came together to demand the dismantling of the “Jungle” and an end to “pressure from migrant flows.”

A CGT leaflet circulated on the ports in Calais, calling for a “general mobilization,” supposedly to save the port, which was “in grave danger.” The leaflet proposed forming a human chain along the port and joining farmers, businessmen and truckers to block highways with go-slow operation to block the roads. The CGT thus proposed to carry out exactly the actions also being advocated by the “Great rally of the Calais region.”

Contacted by the news site *Médiapart*, the CGT secretary for the Calais port and docks, Hervé Caux, initially responded that the leaflet was “apolitical, not from the CGT.” Asked later by journalists from this site about the presence of CGT members at the protest, he suddenly cut off the interview, declaring that he “would

not reply to *Médiapart*.”

The day after joining this far-right protest, feeling itself exposed, the CGT published a statement in *L’Humanité*, the French Stalinist daily. The purpose of this statement was to cover its reactionary policy and to defend itself from criticism of its political alignment with the far right. The statement falsely presented the CGT as an anti-imperialist ally of the migrants, while also echoing media denunciations of their struggle to reach Britain.

It declared, “For several years, the people of the Middle East and East Africa have suffered from multiple conflicts, often provoked and manipulated in the capitalist interests of great powers like France, England, the United States, which incidentally deprived these peoples and their countries of wealth, leaving them in misery, poverty, and disarray. Today, in the Calais region, 10,000 refugees that have fled these conflicts live in inhuman conditions that are not worthy of the land of the Rights of Man. Each day, they put their life in peril to try to reach England, which is unjustly presented as an El Dorado, but in fact is full of cheap, exploited labor.”

The CGT’s strategy—to posture as an internationalist, anti-imperialist organization while joining far-right demonstrations—is a disgusting political lie.

In fact, the CGT and its political allies defend imperialist wars and the anti-immigrant policies of the PS government, which it helped elect in 2012. The New Anticapitalist Party (NPA) and the Left Front backed the proxy wars waged in Libya and Syria by the NATO powers, allied with Islamist fighters. These wars sowed chaos and destruction across the region, driving tens of millions of people from their homes and claiming hundreds of thousands of lives.

The CGT itself joined the NPA and the Left Front in

helping the media promote these wars. On 5 December, 2012, as the Pentagon was preparing to admit that its opposition militias in Syria included terrorist forces tied to Al Qaeda, the CGT signed a statement alongside other French trade union federations to applaud the NATO intervention in Syria.

Focusing its fire only on the “bloodthirsty” Syrian regime, the CGT called for a stronger NATO intervention, presenting what it now acknowledges are the capitalist geo-strategic interests of the imperialist powers as forces for democracy in Syria. The unions, according to this statement published in *L'Humanité*, “call upon the international community to redouble its efforts and its determination to force human rights to be respected and end this barbarism.”

This reactionary class orientation is shared all the way up to the highest governing bodies of the CGT.

Asked about the far-right protest in Calais on September 7, CGT General Secretary Philippe Martinez defended the participation of CGT members in it: “Yes, there is a protest that raises some questions in Calais, but the reasons that one or other person has for going are not the same. Now, some people are exploiting it to stir up hatreds. This story has been going on for 14 years. I want to simply criticize the attitude of the employers, who blackmail workers and say that if the Jungle is not dismantled, their businesses will close.”

By stating only that diverging views exist inside the protest without criticizing any of them, Martinez effectively hides the political collaboration that exists between the CGT and various neo-fascist groups that carry out aggressive propaganda and violent actions in Calais. He thus covers up the reactionary class role of the CGT.

What the CGT’s participation in a neo-fascist protest alongside employers’ groups demonstrates is its profound hostility to the international working class. Its longstanding nationalist orientation, inherited from the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF), to a so-called Union of the Left around the PS, has been transformed over the decades since the Stalinist restoration of capitalism in the USSR in 1991. By blocking struggles against various governments, particularly of the PS, it presided over the destruction of its own base in the working class.

Cut off from workers who increasingly refused to join it in the work places, forced to seek financing from the

state and employers groups for 95 percent of its budget, the French union bureaucracy has become an empty shell—piloted by the ruling class to control and strangle workers struggles.

The fact that the CGT is now organizing joint actions with the far right and employers groups marks a major step in the reactionary evolution of the affluent social layers from which its bureaucracy is drawn. These social layers are organically incapable of expressing any opposition to the PS government and its police state policies. In fact, they are ready to support its most ruthless policies, as their participation in the neo-fascist protest in Calais makes clear.

The treatment of foreign workers has time and again exposed the nationalist and anti-working class character of the CGT’s policies. In 2009, undocumented workers occupied a trade union hall in Paris to demand that the CGT organize a struggle to regularize their status and get them papers. They were violently expelled by riot police units, whom the CGT had called to intervene, based on the close collaboration that now exists between the union bureaucracies and state security forces.



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