

In northern France, Calais mayor bans distribution of meals to migrants

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In an inhuman action, Calais mayor Natacha Bouchart of the right-wing Les Républicains (LR) signed an order on Thursday, March 2, prohibiting the distribution of meals to migrants.

After the brutal dismantling by police of the “La Jungle” camp, at the orders of President François Hollande’s Socialist Party (PS) government last October, and the dispersion across France of some 6,000 refugees wanting to go to Britain, at least 700 still live near Calais, in deplorable conditions. Several new migrants arrive daily in Calais, mostly from the Middle East, Africa and the Indian subcontinent.

85,000 people sought asylum in France in 2016, mostly from Sudan, Afghanistan, Haiti, and Albania. Almost two-thirds of their applications were rejected. The actual number of undocumented migrants is certainly higher.

During the visit to Calais by PS Interior Minister Bruno Le Roux on Wednesday, Bouchart said she wanted to prevent the formation of “magnets for migrants” and also to keep new “gathering points” from reappearing in Calais. Le Roux agreed, saying he also would “firmly oppose any gathering point”. Just for form, he added that “we will not prevent the distribution of meals”, which did not prevent Bouchart from signing her barbaric order the next day.

Bouchart said she was “personally opposed, even if it is humanly difficult to say,” to any humanitarian provision in Calais, whether it be meals or showers set up by Catholic Relief.

The legal argument of the municipal order is based on the prohibition of gatherings within a defined perimeter of the city. It “prohibits the abusive, prolonged and repeated occupation of the industrial zone of the Dunes” and asserts that the distribution of meals for migrants is “likely to disturb public order, safety and

security.”

Sarah Arrom, who works for the charity Utopia56, reported that police used tear gas on Thursday to prevent volunteers from providing breakfast to 30 teenagers: “Tear gas has never been used before when we tried to distribute meals.”

Some leaders of the charities said they would not comply with Bouchart’s reactionary order. “We have been distributing food both day and night for two months, and we will continue to do so for a simple reason: people are hungry,” said Gaël Monzy of Utopia56.

Renke Meuwese of Refugee Community Kitchen and Help Refugees, told the media that kitchens were cooking about 400 meals a day, compared with about 50 during the previous month.

A Catholic Relief official, Vincent de Coninck, said he was “amazed that a politician could forbid children to wash and eat.”

However, aid volunteers in Calais are powerless to stop escalating attacks on the democratic rights and humanitarian conditions of the refugees. Closely connected to the petty-bourgeois social milieu of the parties and trade unions which operate on the periphery of the PS, they cannot and do not try to mobilise the working class to defend the rights of immigrants.

Faced with increasing attacks on immigrants by the PS and LR, the charities argue above all that their actions facilitate the police and health authorities’ defence of public order.

They stressed that food distributions make it possible to “avoid deaths on the streets,” to ensure “the safety of the people of Calais by avoiding theft and possible attacks” and to “identify medical problems, in particular the possible spread of infectious diseases.” They also point out that “the charities do this work

because the state and public authorities do not carry out their own obligations, both legal and humanitarian.”

Only a broad and politically independent mobilisation of workers across Europe can stop the escalation of attacks on refugees and immigrants.

On November 23, Pierre-Alain Mannoni, a teacher-researcher at Nice Sophia Antipolis University, was tried for taking three wounded Eritrean girls to the doctor in his car. On January 4, at the Nice court the public prosecutor called for an eight months' suspended prison sentence for the farmer Cédric Herrou, 37, for helping migrants near the Franco-Italian border.

These actions by the authorities are part of a wider strategy by all EU governments to discourage people in the Middle East and Africa from fleeing the imperialist wars that have devastated their countries for more than 15 years. Extreme right-wing attitudes, which would have been identified with the positions of the National Front, have become commonplace in mainstream French and European bourgeois politics.

Political parties and the media have long been campaigning against migrants in order to poison the political atmosphere and divide workers along ethnic and religious lines.

The Stalinist CGT (General Confederation of Labour) union confederation participated in the far-right demonstration on September 5 of last year calling for the dismantling of the “Jungle”. It thus contributed to the anti-immigrant hysteria whipped up by the candidates in the April-May 2017 French presidential elections.

Indeed, the CGT and its political allies, the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) and the Left Front alliance of the French Communist Party and Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Left Party, defend the proxy wars in Syria and Libya with the help of Islamist forces as well as the anti-immigrant policies of the Socialist Party, which they supported during the 2012 presidential elections.



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