

# IN FRANCE — WORKERS FIGHT RACISM

*by the Committee of Correspondence on France*

"The immigrants waved red banners, jostled and insulted me, shouted threats of revolution. They surged up to the very door of the cathedral."

Herve de Fontmichel, fascist mayor of Grasse, France (New York Times, August 14, 1973)

"We won't let the immigrants go it alone, most of the population is with them; they should get equal pay. We will support them to the maximum because they are justified."

French worker, Grasse  
(Liberation, French daily, June 18, 1973)

On March 12, a strike broke out in the largest factory in France, the Renault auto plant in Billancourt. It was led by Algerian, Senegalese, Polish, Portugese, and other "immigrant" and French workers. On April 12, "immigrant" workers led a strike at the Renault plant in Flins. This was followed by strikes against the Peugeot auto plants in St. Etienne and La Ciotat, demanding equal pay for equal work, no more slave labor for "immigrants"! How did this situation arise -- strikes led by workers of a dozen nationalities with anti-racist demands? This article will take a look at racism in France towards "immigrant" workers and what is being done about it.

Since 1945, millions have come to France looking for work; from Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Senegal, Mali, Sierre Leone, Mauritania, Guadalope, Martinique, Austria, Poland, Spain, Italy, Greece, Syria, Turkey and India. Capitalism creates this huge force of travelling

workers; it needs them as a source of cheap labor. They leave countries often run by the U. S., France, the USSR, et al, where capitalism has created unemployment, starvation wages, fascism, and, in the case of Portugal, a growing draft for imperialist war in Mozambique and Angola.

The four million "immigrant" workers today in France comprise 20% of all workers in industry and 30% in construction. Without them many enterprises would disappear. 90% of the workers on France's large scale farms come seasonally from Spain.

Important numerically, they are even more important economically. They are given the worst jobs (49% of the women who come to France from other countries work as "domestics"), and are paid 25%--50% less than other workers, creating even greater profits for the French bourgeoisie.

Super-profits are also made from the smuggling trade and from the incredibly bad housing they are forced to live in. All workers in France face very high rents and Europe's worst housing shortage, for "immigrants" the situation is even sharper. In 1969, a newspaper "discovered" that 541 black African workers employed at an old chocolate factory were sharing eleven rooms in an "immigrant hostel" owned by, you guessed it, the boss. Most of the rooms had no windows and there were five toilets. This is not unusual; it is typical.

Thousands more live in bidonvilles -- shanty towns built with discarded building materials -- cardboard, plywood, etc.



Travailleurs français et immigrés côte à côte dans la lutte de Renault.  
 FRENCH AND "IMMIGRANT" WORKERS FIGHT SIDE BY SIDE

There are 359 in the Paris area alone and the French government estimates that 42% of the workers from North Africa live in these shanty towns. Water is a big problem. At Nanterre, one bidonville of 1,000 shares a water tap with a nearby bidonville. Most have no electricity.

"Our beds look like the inside of a dog kennel. We all suffer from colds and our health is going downhill. The winter is dreadful. Here the streets are cold, the shacks aren't sound and they are very damp. "I have long since given up hope of finding a room. I live in a bidonville with 150 others. We have no lavatory or cold water supply and as for hot water, it would be the height of luxury. The water supply is about a kilometer from our apartments. We sleep on planks propped up by stones." "You have to line up for an hour and a half, sometimes

two, for water. There is one toilet for eleven shacks."

(S. Castles and G. Kosack, Immigrant Workers and Class Structure in Western Europe, Oxford University Press, 1973, pp. 301-302)

Conditions like these obviously mean serious illnesses for adults and especially children.

"Immigrant" workers have been fighting together against this disgusting form of housing for years. Committees, marches, rent strikes are common occurrences. In the working class Paris suburb of St. Denis, West African workers have been fighting steadily since 1969 for new housing, despite the deportation of four workers involved. They recently won some housing.

Throughout France, "immigrant" workers have shown great determination and multi-national or inter-national unity. In 1967, chemical workers in Lyons went on strike. 20% of those involved were "immigrant" workers representing 19 nationalities, the largest being Portugese. Every effort, including the threat of deportation, was made to get the Portugese as a group to act as strikebreakers with no success. In May 1968, when millions of workers struck, seized their factories, fought the police and the state, "immigrant" workers joined in. Workers from the French West Indies seized several offices connected with immigration in the Overseas Department. Between May and September 1968, several hundred "foreigners" were deported. Contrary to what is commonly thought most of these were workers, not students.

These workers who create great profits, also create great problems for the French bourgeoisie. Now, workers of a dozen nationalities are beginning to lead class struggles, as the strikes at Renault show. This is what the French bourgeoisie and the ruling classes of Algeria, Portugal, Morocco, Senegal, Spain et al fear most -- class unity destroying national lines and that is international in its outlook. The Portugese government was so scared of the lessons to be learned, in class unity, in revolution, in multi-national struggle that they sent special buses to pick up "their" workers as soon as the May 1968 strike movement started!!

To stop this inter-national unity, to intimidate "immigrant" workers, to divide nationality against nationality, "foreign" born worker against "native" born, to divide French workers from the militant leadership of "immigrants," the French government has launched a vicious offensive of racism.

## RACIST OFFENSIVE

### 1. The Fontanet-Marcellin Laws

By law, "immigrants" are in a state of semi-slavery. Previously all "immigrants"

had to obtain a work permit and a residency card from the Minister of Labor, which is bad enough. The government moved to "simplify" these laws in November of 1972 with the Fontanet-Marcellin laws (Marcellin is a minister in the French government who worked under Nazi collaborator Petain during W.W. II). Under these laws, the "foreign" worker must get his work permit and his residency card (without which he can't get housing) from his boss who gets it from the police. This "simplified" procedure puts the workers' means of life, his job and housing, under the direct will of his boss. He is also, as the law states, under the "free surveillance" of the police! This makes things much "simpler" for the ruling class.

If a worker enters France without previously arranging for work, he can't get a work card or a residency card (and therefore no housing). Those who have or find jobs and given permits can't change jobs without losing both cards (and housing). However, a portion of those who have jobs are either belatedly or never given cards, putting them in double jeopardy and forcing them to buy phoney cards to get housing. All this is a complicated way of withholding the right to strike from "immigrants". Clearly this law is an attack on all workers. In a series of strikes at the SOLLAC steelworks, many workers occupied their departments. One such occupation was carried out by a department of "immigrant" workers and SOLLAC was quickly able to get an injunction against that particular department.

These laws are presented as "defending" French workers. They provide for the lay-off of "immigrants" if there is "tension on the labor market." The law also provides that "immigrant" workers be housed by their bosses, who house them in isolation from French workers.

The powerful revisionist "communist" party, which controls France's largest union, the Confederation General du Travail, says these laws have "good" aspects and call to further

"humanize" them by 1) if an "immigrant" is expelled the reasons should be good (!) and made public and 2) a committee including foreigners should determine residency and judge expulsions. "Immigrant" workers have rejected this "humanism" and the French "communist" party.

## 2. Fascist Grouplets--Same Line as the Bourgeois State

These laws haven't done their job. Passed in November '72, the spring of '73 saw the biggest strikes yet of "immigrant" and French workers. Not by chance, the past year also saw the increased activity of fascist grouplets. The most prominent of these has been the New Order. It is made up of police and Frenchmen who once owned property in Algeria. It has not been large, but it has been well protected by the police, well financed and armed. It directs particular racist fire against Algerian workers, who are the most numerous "immigrants", suffer the greatest unemployment (18%), and have a history of fighting the French bourgeoisie both in France and Algeria. The New Order's nazi line, as seen in its press and where not blocked out on city walls, is "Stop unchecked immigration" and "The word of an Arab is worse than the word of a dog." They are not given to subtleties. They are responsible for beating Algerians, firebombing cafes frequented by Algerians, and the murder of a Portugese worker, Fernando Ramos. (They are aided in terrorism by another fascist grouplet, the Israeli international police, who murdered an Algerian militant in Paris this summer).

An important point about this group is that it is not to the right of the government. Both have the same line of intimidating and controlling "immigrant" workers. The French government is more active than the fascists in directly suppressing "immigrants". In July, a policeman murdered Malok a Yesid, an eight year old Arab girl. In August '73 alone, the government deported Mohamed Najeg, a Tunesian worker and leader of a

committee to defend the life and rights of immigrants; an Algerian student who aided the fight of workers (and who was forcibly put on a boat) and Maurice Courbage, a Syrian who had been part of a struggle with Tunesian workers for work permits. The French government is also responsible for removing "foreign" names from ballots during union elections in many factories. The point is that the fascists, like New Order, are not a separate or more "extreme right" danger than the French government. What happened in Grasse this summer is a testament to the government's terrorism and to its tremendous fear.

## 3. Racist Offensive in Grasse.

"The bosses hire us without work contracts, make promises and give us nothing, the shop owners call us a dirty race. . We decided to strike Tuesday and tell others to join us. We were demanding a pay increase because the bosses don't pay and we have no rights. Once I was fired, without back pay. I went to the Labor Inspector in Nice and I was told he was 'out to lunch.' I had not eaten in two days. It is because of things like this that we fight." Algerian worker in Grasse. (Liberation, June 8, 1973)

Grasse is an industrial town in the south of France with a large "immigrant" population -- North African, Italian, Spanish. On June 10, hundreds of workers, North African, Italian, Spanish, joined by some French workers went on strike and marched demanding work permits, higher pay and decent housing. The next day they continued, confronting the mayor. That afternoon, they were standing around the "immigrant" quarter discussing the days' events when hundreds of policemen and the Merchants Vigilance Committee attacked them, led by the mayor wrapped in a French flag. All that night and into the next day, the police and their friends rampaged through the "immigrant" quarter, tearing up apartments, throwing belongings into the street, beating children, women and men. It was also reported that the police threw "immigrants"

into the countryside from policecars, leaving two for dead and many seriously wounded.

The mayor explained, "I am the mayor, and I must assure peace for my citizens. All night one hears the racket provoked by the Arabs, their insolence, their way of talking to women." (L'Express, July 2, 1973) and further "They are professional slackers, living off the dole. It is the 2,000 North Africans who are the trouble makers, and Grasse has gone beyond its capacity to absorb them. The Italians and Spaniards are good workers and we welcome them." (NY Times, August 14, 1973) He was hysterically trying to divide workers who had marched together. He "welcomes" these workers at less than a dollar an hour. In August, the mayor kicked 600 North Africans out of town. Without doubt, all workers in Grasse have gone beyond their capacity to "absorb" this man's racket.

The Merchant's Vigilance Committee decried the "Henchmen of Mohammed" who "insolently accost our women in the streets and occupy our hospital beds (!)." (NY Times, August 14, 1973) The New Order rallied to the slogan "Alert, Alert, Your Safety Is Endangered!"

#### RACISM CAN BE DEFEATED

The New Order's Security was in peril. A few days later the New Order started publicizing for a meeting in Paris on June 21 around the slogan "Stop Unchecked Immigration!" On June 21, three and a half thousand students tried to stop the meeting, saying, "Fascists shouldn't speak, they should be buried." They battled literally thousand of police for hours and hospitalized 76 of them. Minister Marcellin was forced to ban the New Order, while also banning a student group involved in the action.

In Grasse, "immigrant" and French workers have had meetings to discuss the situation. This is not to say French workers aren't racist; indeed they have a long way to go to defeat

This is the Mayor  
of Grasse, Heive  
de Foutmichel

J'HABITE  
DEPUIS  
40 ANS DANS  
CETTE VILLE!...  
ET JAMAIS  
JE N'AI  
ETE BRUTA-  
LISE PAR  
LA POLICE!!

Translation: I've  
lived in this town  
for 40 years and  
I've NEVER been  
brutalized by the  
police.



their own racism. But many fight it. As they do in the U.S.A., newspapers reported "Race War" in Grasse. As in the U.S., this is a lie. "Committees of Struggle" and "Committees of Action" of French and "immigrant" workers exist in some factories throughout France to fight on the job. Many marches have been held against the Fontanet-Marcellin laws. Many "multi-national" self-defense groups exist.

The March 12 strike against Renault-Billancourt marked a big step forward. It was led by militant immigrant and French workers and carried out by workers' committees that had rejected the traditional "C" P leadership. At the Renault plant in Flins, on April 4, a French supervisor insulted a Moroccan worker. A fight broke out between the two and the Moroccan worker was fired. His department, made up of "immigrant" workers representing seven

nationalities and French workers immediately walked off the job winning back the Moroccan's job.

The April 17 strike at Renault-Flins was initiated and led by assembly line workers from Senegal, Yugoslavia, Morocco, etc. Like the Billancourt strike it raised demands of higher pay for all and equal pay for equal work. Some French workers supported it, some didn't. It is an indication of the kind of class unity and leadership that exists that after the strike four French workers, two Senegalese, one Portuguese, and twenty Moroccans were fired. The strength of all these struggles has been their high level inter-national unity; their weakness has been racism.

### BUILD A WORKING CLASS INTERNATIONAL

The French, Algerian, Spanish et al governments and companies like Renault and Citroen (which has stopped hiring black workers) recognize the danger these traveling "immigrant" workers represent. 50% of the workers who come to France return to the countries of their birth; others are deported; others go home for holidays. This means that the experiences in class struggle at Renault travel to the cities and villages of Senegal, to Portugal, to factories and farms in Algeria, etc. and the experiences of class struggle in Senegal, Portugal, Algeria travel to France. These workers can have an enormous effect. For example, many "immigrant" workers are employed in auto. The auto industry exists in most of the places "immigrant" workers travel to and from-- Casablanca in Morocco, in Italy, Spain, Yugoslavia, etc. These workers could give leadership to organized class struggle, across borders, in one industry, or in all.

### FRANCE PROVES YOU CAN DO IT

The "multi-national" class struggle in France destroys decades of propoganda, millions of pages of bourgeois sociology and anthropology. At Flins, side by side at work and

in struggle are : French workers from the cities and from the farms, Senegalese workers from small villages, workers who are members of tribes, Algerians raised in France and Algerians raised in the Algerian countryside, Croats together with Serbs; children of workers and children of peasants; a dozen languages and several religions. The so-called "uncrossable barriers" between so-called "alien cultures", "North African Moslem", "West African", "French Catholic", between the city boy and the country boy -- are broken by class struggle.

There are many nationalities in the world, but only two classes. The French, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish etc. ruling classes stand on one side and all workers stand on the other. No worker is "foreign" to the working class. The very words "immigrant" and "nationalities" mask the fact that workers are workers. The borders erected between workers, the "immigrant" status, "work permits" etc. are used to divide and escalate exploitation.

On May 1, 1973, the international workers' holiday, nationalist organizations leafletted the "immigrant" quarters urging them to meet and march separately from French workers. This was rejected. This May Day thousands of workers from many nations marched under the banner:

TRAVAILLEURS FRANCAIS--IMMIGRES  
MEME COMBAT!  
WORKERS FRENCH -- IMMIGRANT  
SAME FIGHT!

### Same Story All Over the World

Racism is an international poison used by the ruling classes of the world to divide the international working class. In the U. S. A. the ruling class would like to see race war between black, Spanish and white workers. It doesn't exist so they make it up -- as they recently did in Boston, Mass., and as they did in Grasse France. The French New Order

says, "Racial differentiation: the white race is not absolutely superior. Simply, statistics show that it is the most apt to progress in the evolutionary sense. The New Order affirms that each race has the right to live according to its own rythme." Sound familiar?? Sounds like something straight out of the mouths of U. S. racists Hernstein, Shockley and Co. Racist propoganda and racist violence is increasing. It won't go away by itself. The only opposite of racism is internationalism. The only way it will finally be buried is through international revolution.

Sources:

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## Report China Bid To Dalai Lama

NEW DELHI—Newspaper reports here indicate that China is negotiating with the exiled Tibetan leader, the Dalai Lama, about his possible return to his country. One New Delhi newspaper, Motherland, said that accord-

ing to recent reports, the Chinese occupying forces abandoned their repressive policy last October, releasing several hundred Buddhist monks from labor camp and starting restoration work on

the Dalai Lama's palace.

The Tibetan spiritual leader fled to India in 1959 following the eruption of a revolt against the Chinese. He is currently on a world tour.

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## PEKING GOES SHOPPING

Henry Kissinger's cordial dealings with Chinese leaders apparently have touched on a surprising subject: Peking has reportedly expressed interest in buying weapons from the United States. China's needs include tanks, armored personnel carriers and transport planes to give its foot-slogging army more mobility. Reacting to the reports, Pentagon experts express skepticism on two main counts. First, any deal with Peking would require a Presidential waiver of laws that currently ban arms sales to Communist countries. Secondly, China has long been reluctant to rely on outside arms suppliers, preferring to manufacture its own weapons, usually from foreign prototypes. But sources close to Kissinger say that, although Peking has not yet begun full-scale negotiations on purchasing American arms, it has already moved beyond the stage of preliminary soundings.

## ADDENDUM

Arab workers are fighting and will fight back hard against racism and racist murder. On September 3 and 14 thousands of Arab and other workers went on strike as a working class response to the vicious murder of seven Algerian workers in Marseilles by fascists. These two general strikes shut down General Motors, Citroen, Renault, factories and shipyards in Marseilles, Paris, Toulon, Aix, Nice, and Toulouse. A newspaper published by Arab workers stated "This unified action was not only understood by French workers, but agreed to and defended by them; in many factories and shipyards they took part in the strike and are now organizing common struggles with French workers." The fruit of the French bourgeoisie's efforts to divide and conquer the working class through racism will be a united, fighting, anti-racist workers' movement.