

Address to the wage-earners, unemployed and precarious workers of all the countries in the European Union

The following manifesto, published before the end of the CGT-led strikes in the refineries which had for several weeks raised the spectre of fuel shortages throughout France, remains of interest for its serious attempt to outline the background to the French context (the anti-CPE movement, previous pension revolts etc) but also to begin to argue for an escape from what it calls the 'national ghetto'. Rennes has been for several years at the forefront of the various movements, especially those anchored in the universities, and this manifesto demonstrates a degree of acuity and seriousness we think warrants its circulation. That doesn't mean there's nothing to criticise in what follows; quite the contrary. The following text is an adjustment of a translation already circulated by participants on assorted anglophone websites.

The 'Marfin bank' episode, referred to in the text, was a disaster during the Greek anti-austerity movement earlier this year, in which a relatively ordinary bank-burning on the fringe of a demonstration led to the deaths of several employees trapped inside. Naturally it had a stifling effect on the movement which is only now beginning to fade. A good account from comrades in Greece is available at Occupied London. <http://bit.ly/dx7Hjl>

We are precarious workers, wage-earners, students or unemployed, currently taking part in the struggle against the pension reform by the Sarkozy government which plans to postpone the legal retirement age and to extend the number of years of contributions to be entitled to a full pension. This measure will lead to the worsening of the living conditions of the precarious sections of the population and a significant advance of the reign of profit. This is

in line with the Thatcherite policies pursued by the French government over the last four years, as in most European countries during the 20-year reign of neo-liberal orthodoxy. This politics of social regression (privatisations, wage freezes, cuts in the public sector and in social spending) is all the more harshly felt because of the 2008–2009 recession (and its trail of mass redundancies) which, far from leading to a revision of the neo-liberal dogmas, was able to justify a new round of austerity plans at the expense of the working class.

In many countries such as Greece and Britain, governments no longer hesitate to announce sharp cuts in wages and pensions while they spend tens of billions to save banks. Everywhere, measures that are beneficial to the bourgeoisie are on the increase: "tax shields"; ultra-precarious contracts under which the employer's exempted from tax, when he's not exempted from wages too; simplified lay-off procedures; restrictions on the right to strike and criminalisation of social movements. Everywhere, they try to divert popular discontent onto scape goats: the Roma, the Arab, the Unemployed-who-does-not-want-a-job will be the perfect culprits. Everywhere, this Europe that was built on the myth of a continuous social and cultural progress, guaranteed by the institutions, is in the process of recreating the unwanted proletariat it thought

that it had assimilated. The peace between the European countries has as a two-fold side effect: the export of conflict aimed at the optimal exploitation of resources outside the continent; and the cooperation of all the petty lords of the European economy against everything that goes against its laws, whether popular resistance or social welfare schemes. At the same time as they barricade themselves against migrants they continue to import that part of the work force whose function is to carry out the work that the "native Europeans" no longer want, and to export industries that can cheaply exploit the other part of the work-force stranded on the other side of the walls by the multinationals of Fortress Europe.

Against this disheartening situation, the events of the last spring in Greece paved the way for a counter-offensive on a European scale. But the strategy of the trade unions, timorous to say the least, and the sudden halt in the revolt caused by the tragic event at the Marfin bank, postponed until now the resumption of open conflict. As for us, subordinates of France PLC, since 2003 (the previous movement against another pension "reform") we've gotten used to the strategy, which was doomed to fail, of limited "days of action" scattered in time. After a month of conflict, the rank and file of the unions is now in favour of an unlimited and generalised strike. According to a recent poll,

-Some participants in the general assembly of the students of the University Rennes 2, in the movement of unemployed and precarious workers, and in the inter-professional general assembly of Rennes.

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the majority of the population wants a “radicalisation” of the movement in the face of an inflexible government. We all remember the movement of the students and high school children of the spring of 2006, the so-called “anti-CPE” movement, which was partly successful, and which established the economic blockade as a form of struggle, in addition to striking and demonstrating. In most big cities, at the same time as universities on strike were blockaded and occupied for several weeks and mass demonstrations regularly ended in clashes, the strikers used the tactic of blockading the roads, the department stores, the train stations and the airports, as well as post sorting offices and bus terminals. At the end, the bosses union (the MEDEF) begged one other “inflexible” government to show a flexibility that would allow the resumption of normal economic activities. The CPE was withdrawn (but not the broader law of which it was only a part).

Nowadays, it is not a coincidence that the audacious experiments of

the 2006 movement appear as the elemental modes of actions of the most active tendencies in the struggle against the current government project. In Rennes, the department stores are targeted in every demonstration. The most resolute strikes affect oil refineries and depots among other things. The Marseilles strikers, a true avant-guard of the movement, paralyse the harbour and impose on their city the rhythm of the movement. The train drivers are also on the front line, and the lorry drivers have joined the movement. We know that the more we trust our own force, the more our joyful determination becomes contagious. The images of the flying pickets in Barcelona last September, that forced all the shops to close during the one-day general strike, probably played a role in the will to systematise these practices. We know that in order to win, we must be able to counteract the government’s current strategies, which consist in waiting for the deterioration of the conflict and the use of

techniques of intimidation. This can particularly be seen in the increase in the police violence: several young demonstrators badly injured hundreds of arrests and outrageous sentences (for example, prison sentences for setting a bin on fire), the use of truncheons and tear gas to clear traffic blockades as a now common practice. Added to this use of violence, the right to strike is totally disregarded (workers in the petrochemical industry being requisitioned and threatened with harsh sentences if they refuse)

In our opinion, what is now needed is a massive use of the weapon of economic blockade. By use of this means, the unemployed and precarious workers who do not have access to a stable and permanent workplace can participate in the pressure built up by “traditional” workers against the dividends of the bosses. Economic blockade, as a technique to intensify the strike, is nevertheless a means that is accessible to all. If a strike (of wage-earners, of students, schoolchildren,

the “strike” by the unemployed and precarious ones against forced labour) frees up time and attention from their ordinary subordination to the economic circuits, economic blockade makes it possible to use fully the time that is thereby freed for the disruption of these same circuits, which are run by the powers we’re fighting against, and to disrupt them in a far more reliable way than the peaceful demonstrations which have absolutely no effect on them (we should mention for example the great business done by the fast food industry during the “days of action”). In an integrated economy, which affects everything through its flows of capital, commodities and information, the economic blockade allows the generalisation of the impacts caused by a strike that’s still limited to a few sectors. What’s more, it can create the possibility of encounters between the strikers who come to blockade a workplace and the wage-earners of this same workplace who are by this action encouraged to join the movement. Striking itself can be directly considered as a weapon in the blockading of the economy, which helps the movement to keep going; and such a strike needn’t be indefinite (it’s tough on workers to strike for too long at once): go-slow strikes, rolling strikes, strikes which paralyze certain “key” sectors or positions which can be supported financially by workers in the others.

Clearly, the success of this movement, even if it’s only to be symbolic

or incomplete, can only come from this: that each collective of struggle, each local union, each group of militants, friends, colleagues, parents, whether formal or informal, at the same time as it tries to coordinate with others, gives itself the liberty to constitute its own flying picket. Such forms of availability to the struggle would be totally compatible with moments of slow-down when we could take the time to organise materially, to share a meal together, and to share ideas, songs or experiences... In a period in which the government does not hesitate to use police intervention or the threat of prison sentences to break the picket lines and force the resumption of work, the fact of being ready to move quickly, of being able to gather as quickly as possible in one point to constitute a mass that cannot be flushed out, as well as spreading to block the metropolis at ten different places at the same time, is in our opinion the only truly coherent way to “become involved” (to use the union slogan), the best use of the time freed by the strike.

As we come closer and closer to a fuel shortage, the question of which are the priority targets for the blockade seems already solved: refineries, oil depots, roads and rails, department stores, distribution platforms. We’d also point out how interesting blockades which contribute to the spreading of the situation outside the national ghetto are. For example, let’s think about tourism,

which constitutes one of the main profitable economic sectors of our museum-continent: luxury hotels and restaurants, big cultural shows, luxury consumption... It’d be interesting, too, to call on some parts of the media to “deblockade” the flow of information and give a voice to those who are institutionally deprived of one. Let’s think, too, about the “business districts” of our metropolis, which could spread to all world the bad reputation of their badly colonised “provinces”...

Belgian train workers, Castilian steelworkers, Marsellaise dockers, Greek couriers, temporary workers, precarious and unwanted people from everywhere, your struggle is ours. Everywhere, we need to respond with solidarity and in a coordinated way to all attacks coming from any of our national oligarchs, who are more or less in connivance with European bankers and commissioners.

For the end of the counter-reforms and austerity plans, for the improvement of our living conditions, for a policy that welcomes and shows solidarity to the migrants and proletarians of all countries, let’s create, everywhere, struggle committees, inter-professional general assemblies, brigades of flying pickets that are increasingly coordinated beyond the borders. Let’s block the Europe of capital, let’s open up Fortress Europe, let’s get rid of all the Sarkozys, Merkels, Barrosos and other Berlusconis!

Unlimited general strike! Economic blockade.

