editorial

Capitalist exploitation constantly changes, driven by the unrest of the exploited. Capital tries to thrive off their search for a better life by channeling it into controlled labor migration or new job schemes. It wants to re-assemble and re-divide proletarians on the open labor market as well as its hidden undersides by encircling proletarian strong-holds in industry with mass-unemployment and international supply-chains. Capital undermines workers' inflexibility with new technologies.

The organizational starting point for new struggles is already in motion, moving between green field plants and backyard workshops, maquiladoras and banlieues, between global transport links and border controls. Proletarian producer's appropriation of the means of production is an act of creative destruction requiring socialization of experiences. This newsletter tries to contribute to this process by spreading analyses of the changing organization of exploitation and the proletarian struggles within.

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It has been one year since we started publishing this newsletter - time to thank all those who contributed articles and comments so far, who helped with translations and proofreading!

We also took the occasion to make some changes. Up until now the newsletter only appeared in pdf-format so readers could download it from the website, print it out and read it on paper. Following some readers' suggestions we have now changed the website and made all articles available as single html-files, too. That way people can quickly scroll through the contents, print out and forward individual articles, and link texts to other websites. There is also a new search-function so you can quickly get to the information you want. Check it out on: www.prol-position.net.

However, we will continue to publish the newsletter in pdf-format, too, since we think it is most efficient to take the time and read the stuff on paper, allow deeper thoughts, make notes...

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This issue starts with three rather general articles. The Heart of the Beast - An Unknown Entity. Workers' power and the Future of Operaism is a follow-up article on the discussion around Beverly J. Silver's book Forces of Labor (see also in ppnews #2 - online at http://www.prol-position.net/nl/2005/02/silver and in ppnews #3 - http://www.prol-position.net/nl/2005/03/silver). Silver's main thesis is that cycles of capitalist accumulation also increase workers' power on a global scale in a stage-like form - through produc-
tion relocation, technological and organizational innovations and the transition to new core industrial products." But workers’ power does not in every case increase. "Silver insists that this ‘workplace bargaining power’ needs to be shown in every single case and every single struggle." Silver’s (and Giovanni Arrighi’s) historical analysis is seen as a useful concept for understanding the development and current state of workers’ power, contrary to the debate on "multitude" and "post-Fordism," both dominated by ideology rather than empirical research. Silver’s historical perspective on workers’ struggles and her concept of "workers’ bargaining power" also brings us back to the importance of the material production of surplus value and the factory. "We do not know what this ‘unknown entity’, ‘the factory’, will look like today - not in the sense of a stereotype of "steaming chimneys," but as a site and starting point for workers’ power that can concretely and practically disenchant the material rule of capital, thereby giving space again for antagonistic subjectivity. And sure enough, no clever minds or polished theories will give us any answer, but proletarian search processes, in which we take part, which we describe and, at best, at some points expedite.”

The next article - Gender, Migration and Domestic Labor - can be seen as one such search process. It uncovers the hidden reality of exploitation in the domestic work sector world-wide. Mostly (migrating) women, often low paid, with long working hours, are selling their labor-power in households... sometimes working for agencies, sometimes depending on family "employers". "Behind the stories about abuse, slavery, degradation etc, that break into the news every now and again, there is an intrinsic role of this work in the current global division of labor. This article looks at the role of this work in the economies of the receiving and sending countries, the tendency to industrialize this work, the gender dynamic and the implications for families in both countries." The sector is an important part of capitalism, with other sectors relying on the service-labor of these migrant women. There have been some struggles in this sector, too, and further research needs to be done to uncover the formation of this part of the working class.

China in Revolt - Social Struggles in the Chinese Modernization Process shows how behind all talk of the "modernization process," large investments, and the importance of the export-oriented manufacturing sector, one of the most serious problems in China is still the peasant question. The "social apartheid"system, developed since the 1950s, still divides Chinese society and also plays an important role in developing proletarian struggles. While peasants resist land confiscation or tax increases and try to defend the remnants of a relatively egalitarian agrarian system, millions leave the countryside and migrate to the cities, where they work in construction, services, or the private manufacturing sector and are faced with social inequality and discrimination. Meanwhile, (former) state-workers in the cities try to defend their (better) living standards against a Chinese regime that seems determined to carry out the rationalization of the state-owned industries. Peasants, young migrant workers, and the old state-workers all manage to organize struggles, but these struggles mostly remain limited to one area or company. Still, we have to see how long the regime’s crisis management can keep the struggles isolated or whether the different sections of the working-class find a way to overcome repression and division (boundary drawing) strategies.

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The second part of the newsletter consists of articles on specific workers’ struggles and forms of exploitation. Workers’ struggle at Gate Gourmet is getting harder is an up-date on the struggle of catering workers at the airport of Düsseldorf, Germany (see ppnews #4 - http://www.prol-position.net/nl/2005/04/gourmet). The owner, the private equity fund Texas Pacific Group (TPG), has recently prevented a settlement and confronted the workers - already on strike for months - with even deeper cuts in wages and longer working hours. The workers are determined to continue the strike, with the support of the union’s strike pay... and of supporters who organized several blockades of company premises to prevent deliveries to airplanes. The authors of the article make two proposals: a) In Germany the unions started a disgusting nationalist campaign against private equity funds like the TPG. They call them “locusts” (or
Wired - Temp-Work in the Rail-Industry is a report from a factory in Düsseldorf, Germany. It shows the globalized structure of a medium-sized company engaged in manufacturing and the world wide work experience of the flexible workforce. One of the the main issues in the factory - seen from a prol-position - was the situation of the temp workers who accounted for half of all production workers. The temps were paid far less and knew that their contract would only last for the completion of a certain customer order. The report concludes: “It is rather difficult for people to organize actions within short notice, but particularly for the temps that is their only chance. The idea of a go-slow strike came up too late, a great part of the order was already completed, but the connections amongst the temps still too weak for more offensive measures. All in all we have to state the enormous contrast of vast proletarian experiences within the total work-force, a rapid worsening of working conditions and the blatant lack of experiences with collective actions.”

The Interview with Worker from Bosch-Siemens Factory in Berlin (Germany): “Now they call us heroes everywhere!” was made after Bosch Siemens announced the closure of the factory (see the background article on this in ppnews #4 – http://www.prol-position.net/nl/2005/04/washing). The worker describes the strike preparation and how the company backed off its threat to shut the plant. ”After it was clear the plant wasn’t shutting, the number of blue-collar workers calling in sick rose to 17-18 percent and that’s where it remains. Temp workers had to be hired again. And they can’t motivate people anymore. The workers say: fuck it, sooner or later they’re going to close down anyway. Many thought they’d get the three month severance, that would have been more money than they’d see in their whole life. Few workers were happy that the plant isn’t closing!” A surprising perspective? Maybe not if you know about the conditions at work in this factory and what life looks like after years and years in the grind.

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The last part of the newsletter is on the riots in France in fall 2005. The article Riots in the Banlieues in France: Difficult to integrate into the General Class Combat was written by the
group Mouvement Communiste. It is an account of what happened during the riots, the background, the reaction and counter-strategies of the parties, of the Islamic groups, etc. The article states that the question is not, whether the riots were justified. "The desire of this minority of young people to express as loudly as possible their rage against the forces of repression is completely comprehensible." Still, "the problem is not this but in the fact that the informal political expression of this urban violence is not compatible with the perspective of independent proletarian struggle." Tribalism, machismo, the capitalist drug economy, and the "islamisation of souls" are among the problems that play a role in everyday life in these banlieues and in the riots as well. What happened after the riots in France? tries to follow the development in France after the riots until now (February 2006).

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Have fun reading it all! And feel free to send us comments, ideas, articles and interviews...

silver debate

The following article asks what will come out of Operaism. It asks on the basis of the current debates around the subject and on the theses of Beverly J. Silver in her book "Forces of Labor" [see other articles on the debate on Silver’s theses in ppnews #2 and #3; online at http://www.prol-position.net/nl/2005/02/silver and http://www.prol-position.net/nl/2005/03/silver]. The German version of this article was published in Analyse und Kritik, no. 500, November 2005 [see http://www.akweb.de/ak_s/ak500/07.htm].

The Heart of the Beast - An Unknown Entity

Worker's power and the future of Operaism

Today, talking about the future of Operaism for many people means to start with Hardt and Negri's "Multitude" or John Holloway's fetish-critique. In comparison Beverly Silver's historical analysis of the tendencies of worker's power seem politically colorless and sociological.¹ No doubt, "Forces of Labor" is an academic book, not a political manifesto, and it avoids all revolutionary vocabulary. But in all its understatement, "Forces of Labor" contains sharper theoretical tools to grasp capitalism theoretically and practically than what the rather philosophically oriented renewal of Marxism offers us.

Silver’s main thesis is that cycles of capitalist accumulation also increase workers’ power on a global scale in a stage-like form - through production relocation, technological and organizational innovations and the transition to new core industrial products. In 1972, Giovanni Arrighi had already formulated this in a more general way: "The process of capital accumulation is at one and the same time a process of subordination of labor to capital, and a process of development of labor as a force in conflict with capital. In developing the social character of production, capitalist accumulation progressively deprives the individual workers of any method of producing the necessary means for their existence outside of the productive apparatus controlled by capital... From the ashes of the individual bargaining power of workers there is born the collective power of labor."

The basis for this is the increasing concentration and centralization of capital.² Arrighi here refers to the ambivalence and dialectic of the real subject and the increasing power of the "collective worker" (Romano Alquati), one of the core theses of Operaism in the 1960s.

In an epilogue to the English translation (1978) Arrighi says that this hypothesis was too "schematic," the real historical process was not that "linear and consistent."

In further historical studies and though the work of the "World Labor Group" - "Forces of Labor" is based on the outcomes of the latter - this discontinuous development of global workers’ power is more thoroughly traced. The basic idea, that within the process of capital accumulation are in-escapable mechanisms built in which at the same time expand the basis of workers’ power, are not abandoned, but the original mere hypothesis was developed and modified into a historical analysis.

The power of the "collective worker" is not just based on the concentration of capital in the sense


of a social and political aggregation, but also on the increasing destructive potential of workers' actions. This power evolves from the structure and organization of the respective production process: on one hand from the closer linking of different steps of production, on the other hand from the increasing importance and vulnerability of fixed capital. Silver insists that this "workplace bargaining power" needs to be shown in every single case and every single struggle. It should not be misunderstood as a super-historical master key.

Beverly Silver shows how historical processes of class formation are closely linked to the development of newly discovered forms of workplace bargaining power. Using those examples she clarifies how we can get involved in new processes of "class formation". While the current debate on precarity suffers from the search for a new class subject based on "new identity-based self-concepts" and starts from similarities in legal employment status,3 "Forces of Labor" explicitly argues against any identity-based concept of class. Instead, it puts the development of structural power vis-à-vis capital into the center. In the Marxist terminology - that Silver avoids - we could talk about the tracing of processes undermining the very same process of alienation that constantly turns the social potential of living labor into the rule of past labor, i.e. the rule of capital over the individual workers. The legal status is not crucial here as in the case of precarity but the structure of the chain of production is, i.e. the social character of labor, in which workers are involved.

In the 1920s work in the automobile industry was highly precarious and seasonal since every year when the car model was changed the multinational workforce was regularly sacked. Silver points to the historical irony that leftists at the time thought that due to the precarity and heterogeneity the class struggle in the Fordist car factories was irretrievably lost. Only after the great strikes in the mid-1930s did it become obvious that the new technology of the assembly line had not only brought the real subjection to capital to perfection but at the same time it gave the collective worker an enormous potential power, thus facilitating the transition from an atomized labor force to the subject of collective workers.

What is distinct about this advance on Operaism might become clearer when we compare it to the concept of the "Multitude." The original underlying idea is the same: workers' power and workers' subjectivity arise from the qualities of labor socialized by capital. But Arrighi and Silver thoroughly examine this hypothesis historically, thereby not only specifying and modifying it, but also following its traces onto the level of the capitalist world system. Toni Negri on the contrary, by declaring the "socialized worker" as the new class subject, taking the place of the "mass worker," abandoned the correlation between the material structures of production and class formation. From the social character of labor in the abstract sense, that the work of many individual workers is somehow linked together, the existence and power of a new subject was simply deduced without being able to grasp it in real developments.

Sometimes the transition to the "socialized worker" is seen as a justified correction of the one-sided centrality of the factory within early Operaism, often combined with the thesis that the struggles of the 1960s, starting in the factories, had expanded to society and the area of reproduction. But such a view is based on a misconception - both of the motives of the early Operaists for turning to the factory and of the turning away from the factory in the 1970s.

During the 1950s, as a Socialist militant, Raniero Panzieri, founder of the Quaderni Rossi, had taken part in land occupations of landless farmers in Southern Italy. He had defended their "political and organizational autonomy" towards a party that saw these movements merely as economic struggles. Panzieri's decision to turn to the big factories in the North was not based on any cult of the traditional proletariat, but on the question of the power of proletarian assertiveness - in particular of the assertiveness of a Southern Italian proletariat that had paid for its struggles with bloody defeats and stayed under the ideological hegemony of the fascists.

The factory was not seen as an exclusive site of a prototype "worker" in an orthodox-communist sense, but as a center of the power of capital and, therefore, of the power of the workers in Marx's sense when he says that in all forms of society a certain production shapes all other affairs: "It is as
though light of a particular hue were cast upon everything, tingeing all other colours." The tiny Operaist groups Quaderni Rossi and Classe Operaia were not forgotten precisely because their theses proved correct during the workers’ struggles in the 1960s and 1970s, and - notably in Italy - in the militancy in the factory which spread to the whole society, even to the most radical movement against psychiatry.

But this summer of workers’ autonomy was far shorter than often assumed. In the early 1970s the unions as mediators regained lost ground, and neither the workers nor the Operaist groups found an answer to the crisis. What at first seemed to be the expansion of struggle into society and the areas of reproduction was more and more recognizable as the flight out of the factory: "At the same time, the extra-parliamentary groups began their suicidal retreat from the factory, and in general ceased to give much attention to problems of class composition. This has led to a situation where, today, the factory and the working class are almost unknown entities." Negri’s concept of the "socialized worker" carried by a new youth and student movement could only temporarily hide the erosion and integration of worker’s power in the factory and the extra-parliamentary groups’ own political crisis. Those who see the turning away from the factory as a necessary corrective ignore that the loss of power radiated to all areas and colored them with the destructive power of the common neoliberalism.

This indifference and the dominance of ideology over empirical research shapes the current debates on "post-Fordism" and "Multitude." At the same time, in Germany in particular, the factory and its assembly line production has vanished more from peoples minds than in reality.\footnote{Sergio Bologna: The Tribe of Moles, 1977. Online: \url{http://www.geocities.com/cordobakaf/moles.html}}\footnote{"Workers exist, but you cannot see them anymore," write Stéphane Beaud and Michel Pialoux in a unique study "Re-tour sur la condition ouvrière. Enquête aux usines Peugeot de Sochaux-Montbéliard," Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1999 (German: "Die verlorene Zukunft der Arbeiter", Konstanz, UVK-Verlag, 2004). They have followed the changes of factory work at Sochaux-Montbéliard for more than twenty years. For them the political and representative "deconstruction" of the working class explains its today’s "invisibility". For a review of the German edition see express 8/2005.} And while leftist debates on the creativity in post-Fordist labor structures refer to the "short thaw" of "alternatives to Taylorist labor organization" in the early 1990s, for years industrial sociology has identified a renaissance of the assembly line under pressure from the profit crisis.

We do not know what this "unknown entity", "the factory", will look like today - not in the sense of a stereotype of "steaming chimneys," but as a site and starting point for workers’ power that can concretely and practically disenchant the material rule of capital, thereby giving space again for antagonistic subjectivity. And sure enough, no clever minds or polished theories will give us any answer, but proletarian search processes, in which we take part, which we describe and, at best, at some points expedite.

domestic labor

Gender, Migration and Domestic Labor

Introduction

There are huge armies of people, mostly women, doing low paid domestic work in foreign countries. They are the ones that look after the old people, cook the food and clean the homes and offices in those cities where capital is concentrated and professionals are working longer hours on the back of this work. These immigrant workers send huge amounts of money back home, sometimes making up the largest source of foreign currency for the sending countries. But they also leave behind broken families and a ‘care deficit’.

Behind the stories about abuse, slavery, degradation etc., that break into the news every now and again, there is an intrinsic role of this work in the current global division of labour. This article looks at the role of this work in the economies of the receiving and sending countries, the tendency to industrialisation of this work, the gender dynamic and the implications for families in both countries.

We use the term 'domestic work' to mean work traditionally done in the home, by women - e.g. cleaning, cooking and care work. However, what
is considered domestic work is constantly changing. Cooking from scratch is fast becoming unusu-
al and clothes-making almost unheard of. Old people are increasingly being cared for in institu-
tions. One question is whether the current in-
crease of wage workers in the home (nannies, cleaners etc.) and the growth of care homes is sim-
ply part of the on-going tendency of the com-
modification of domestic work.

Trends of migrant women domestic workers

It is hard to get reliable statistics on this subject because not only are many of the immigrants ille-
gal, but also much of the domestic work is not de-
clared by the employer or worker. So much of this is approximation and the real figures are probably
much higher.

In Singapore approximately one in every seven
households employs a migrant domestic worker, including middle-class families. Most migrate from
the Philippines and Indonesia. The migrant domestic worker population grew from five thou-
sand in 1978 to the 2005 level of 150,000.1

In Spain in 2002 there were 393,500 homes with a
domestic employees (most of whom were wom-
en) and about 60 percent of domestic workers are in
the unregistered underground economy.

The UK careers service state that there were
about 928,000 private household workers in 1998.3
The average weekly wage packet is £30 for 4.5
hours work - equivalent to £6.70 per hour. Re-
search by Morphy Richards in 2005 claims that 8
percent of UK households employ a cleaner, the
total wage bill amounts to around £2.8 billion an-
nually. They also discovered strong potential de-
mand, 31 percent of those of interviewed currently
without a cleaner would like to have one. The
group most likely to want a cleaner is 30 to 44 year
olds.4 However, 68 per cent of women with chil-
dren work (and 76 per cent of women without de-
pendant children) in spring 2003 in the UK, so one
can assume many more women are employing
childcare. 5 65 percent of US women with children
work, compared with 15 percent in 1950.

Official statistics show that in the latter half of
the 1990s, there were roughly 802,000 legal private
household workers employed in the United States
of which about 40 percent were childcare work-
ers. 6 But in 1993 the LA times reported that fewer
than 10 percent of those Americans who paid a
house-cleaner reported these payments.7 Meaning
that the figure could be much higher. According
to the Center for Migration Studies, at least 10 per-
cent of the United States’ 3 million illegal immi-
grants worked in childcare in 1993, with roughly
another 10 percent working in other private
household occupations. According to research by
Human Rights Watch, the average US hourly
wage was $2.14, from which deductions for room
and board might, according to U.S. law, still be
made. The average workday was fourteen hours.
Most of the workers were not allowed to leave
their employers’ homes without permission, and
most were only allowed to leave on their one day
off per week-Sunday.8

There is evidence that the biggest growth in do-
местно is in countries with recent fast eco-
номic growth such as Singapore, Bahrain, Kuwait, Hong Kong, and Saudi Arabia rather than
the established ‘first world’ such as the US, West-
ern Europe or Australia. According to the UN,
throughout 1990s more women than men migrat-
ed to the USA, Canada, Sweden, the UK and Is-
rael.9 One can identify four main stream of migra-
tion: South-East Asia to Middle East; former Sovi-
et Bloc to Western Europe, South to North Ameri-
ca and Africa to Europe.

Currently, the International Labour Organiza-
tion estimates that twenty-two million Asians

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1 Ministry of Manpower, "A General Guide on Employ-
ment of Foreign Domestic Workers," September 2003,
http://www.mom.gov.sg/NR/rdonlyres/9E5F26A3-1831-
48E8-A6B3-8F4715EDC12E/S488/General_Guide_Em-
ployment_FDWs_9sep05.pdf.
2 http://www.eiro.eurofound.eu.int/2002/05/feature/es0205-
206f.html
3 http://analyzemycareer.co.uk/index.cfm?aid=283&acao-
careerSearch&subAction=view&id=12963
4 http://www.presswire.co.uk/cgi/news/release?id=1027-
91.
5 http://www.statistics.gov.uk/CCI/nugget.asp?ID=436&Po-
s=1&ColRank=2&Rank=224.
6 http://www.referenceforbusiness.com/industries/Service/
Private-Households.html
7 Barbara Ehrenreich, Maid to Order, Global Women, (Gran-
8 http://hrw.org/english/docs/2001/06/14/usdom176.htm
9 http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/gender/wistat/
work outside of their home country.\(^{10}\) Statistics from the mid 1990s show that in every ten citizens of Sri Lanka works abroad, most of them women. 84 percent of Sri Lankan migrants to the Middle East are women. 70 percent of Filipino migrants in the US are women. Most of these women are doing ‘social’ work in some way - from domestics and care workers, to work in the catering industry, to sex workers.\(^{11}\)

There are more women than men migrating to work, particularly from the Philippines, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka. In these countries, national-level estimates indicate that women comprise 60-75 percent of legal migrants, a significant proportion of whom are employed as domestic workers in the Middle East, Singapore, Malaysia, and Hong Kong.\(^{12}\)

The general increased polarisation of the global economy means that middle class women in the third world earn less than low wage workers in the first world. In Hong Kong the average wage of a domestic worker is 15 times that of a teacher’s salary in the Philippines. Or $176 a month for a professional salary in the Philippines compared to $700 a month in Italy or $1400 in LA as a nanny.

Migrant women often do not come from the lowest classes in their home countries, but from the more middle class, educated classes (especially true for ‘mail order brides’). There is also evidence that as more women take up work in the manufacturing sector in their home regions, more women will later migrate.

### Global cities and low paid work

There are certain cities where there is a high concentration of business head offices, IT businesses, banking firms etc. employing men and women in highly paid, skilled, professional work. These centres are vital to the smooth functioning of global capitalism. To keep this going, and keep the professionals working long hours, there also has to be an army of low paid workers - the data inputters and call centre workers, but also the office and house cleaners, those caring for the children and elderly relatives of the high paid workers, the fast food and ready made meals industry. According to research by Saskia Sassen, ‘between 30 and 50 percent of workers in the leading sectors are actually low-wage workers’.\(^{13}\)

These jobs are not ‘relocatable’. Urban professionals live in the city - and transfer a growing share of ‘domestic’ work onto the market place - either by buying goods and services, or by hiring labour themselves.

In the shadow of these growth sectors - traditionally places of potential high pay and workers empowerment, you see a growth of low-paid low-status workers, who are often migrant, often illegal and marginalised. The fact that sexism and racism are still so prevalent enables people to emotionally deal with this and not feel too bad about the low paid cleaner or kebab shop worker at 3 a.m., because they are the ‘other’. Even if it feels charitable to give someone work, many em-

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10 http://hrw.org/reports/2005/singapore1205/2.htm#_ftn1: International Labor Organization, Towards a Fair Deal for Migrant Workers in the Global Economy (Geneva: International Labor Organization, 2004), p.7. These numbers refer to the total number of migrant workers in receiving countries at a given point in time, including all who had migrated prior to the date and are still inside the country. The flow of migrant workers refers to the numbers going out of a sending country or entering a receiving country during a particular period of time, usually a year. Several limitations constrain migration estimates, including high levels of undocumented migration, lack of record keeping, restricted access to existing data, competing definitions of migration, and difficulties aggregating across diverse sources of information.

11 Janet Henshall Momsen, Gender, Migration and Domestic Service, (Routledge, 1999)


Employers or service buyers would not consider doing that work themselves.

**Industrialization of care work**

Domestic servants and those doing personal care do not fit the picture of modern capitalism (industrialised workplaces, distance between the producer and the consumer). The consumer in this case is often the employer - with all the horrible intimacy of exploitation within a personal relationship. But although there is a rise in people working in private homes - this is nowadays often done via agencies, or else the work is industrialised in the more traditional sense - e.g. the ready-made meals or take-away food being prepared in a workplace, more and more old people going into care homes. This follows the trend of clothes or soap making, herb growing etc..

Employment Agencies - for example Kellys Services - now have a 'home care' division, including services for cleaning, cooking and picking up the children from school. "The fact that employment agencies have moved into providing domestic services signals both that a global labour market has emerged in this area and that there is an effort afoot to standardise these service maids, nannies and home-care nurses deliver".  

A few large cleaning firms who in turn are being bought out by larger conglomerates dominate 25 percent and rising of the home cleaning work in the US. Advantages for the workers are not only some protection from the whims and abuses reported when you are employed directly by the house owner, but also potential for communication and common action because you would know who your colleagues are.

The cleaning firms lay down firm rules about the work process (doing the room next to the kitchen first, dusting from left to right and top to bottom etc.). They impose a division of labour (hovering, dusting, bathroom and kitchen) and work is done in teams of four - each taking on one task. The threat of hidden cameras is used to provide the necessary supervision aspect of work under capitalism. Barbara Ehrenreich (Nickel and Dimed) did a sort of workers inquiry into this sector and wrote up her experience in a chapter of Global Woman, Nannies, Maids and Sex Workers in the New Economy.  

These firms are likely to grow because new clients prefer dealing with a firm than an individual, and because the global professional classes like the standardised, branded 'product' a firm provides. Both worker and service user like the impersonality that capitalist work brings. The intimacy of care work or domestic work can be intensely uncomfortable, as it does not have this distance and alienation from the job that in fact makes it bearable.

**Women's work and working women**

Since the 1960s women have increasingly done 'professional' work. There was a phase when many households were sustained by the man's income and the women stayed at home and did all the domestic tasks, or employed lower class people from the same countries. Now many middle class women are doing higher skilled waged work and employing immigrant women to do the domestic work.

After the demand for domestic workers had nearly vanished, it is now sharply increasing again. 72 percent of all American women now work, making up 45 percent of the workforce. This includes the grandmothers and aunts who may previously have done a lot of childcare or elderly care. The state has not filled in the gap left by these women.

There are many complex reasons however why certain families employ someone else to do their domestic tasks. These include: cutbacks in the welfare state, the increasing age of the population, women headed families, decline of extended family - and a desire for a certain lifestyle. (E.g. the aspiration to live in a very clean house, wear clothes that need hand washing, have a well-tended garden, give dinner parties at home and still work and spend time with the children).

Some women will pay out almost the same per hour as they earn to have a child carer for reasons such as the job they do is not available part time, so they can't look after children after school, but don't want to give up working and their career altogether, such as women on the bottom rung of domestic labor.

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competitive industries in the media or IT. In such cases the increase of domestic work is the result of decrease, not increase of wages in the West, as the woman may want part time work if she could afford it. The situation might be temporary, i.e. a dying elderly relative and the woman needs to stay in work to keep her current status and pay in her career. The work might be undesirable or upsetting e.g. physical care for a parent. Increasingly working class families are also employing people to help out with childcare. This is also partly because increased migration within countries means that the extended family is not around to help out but is also due to migration leading to a very complex and many layered class - so long as someone is willing to do that work for less than you get elsewhere, you may make the choice to employ them.

The value of reproduction

Feminists have long pointed out the low social status or value placed on domestic work. The view of it being demeaning and lowly. When the pool of people that had to share out this work was the immediate family, this view was revealed in the gender relations between the man and the woman of the household. Now this pool of people is the global labour market. We see that it has one of the lowest statuses and lowest pay in the developed world. The pay and social status of domestic workers shows how little this work is valued in our society.

When the unpaid work of raising a child became the paid work of child-care workers, its low market value revealed the abidingly low value of care work generally. There is a vicious circle of domestic work being considered demeaning (and so of low value) because women do it, and women doing it because it is considered demeaning and of low value, economically and socially.

The ‘wages for housework’ debate centred around the fact that re-producing the daily life and needs of the workers (usually men) and bringing up and educating the children was work necessary for the production of surplus value, because it enabled those men to get to work, clothed, fed, emotional needs met, and the children became the next generation of workers. The capitalist division of labour relied on these tasks being done, but did not give it a ‘value’ in the sense of a wage, thereby recognising, valuing and quantifying it.

There is also an implied power relation in someone else cleaning up your stuff and caring for your intimate needs.

From the perspective of capital - money has been invested in the education of a skilled worker, Jane, for example and Jane demands a certain standard of living for that - i.e. a certain wage. Jane spends 15 hours a week on low skilled tasks such a cleaning, she is essentially being paid an IT workers wage (for example) for cleaning. To get that IT worker to work for 50 hours, rather than 35 and spend half of the wage of those 15 hours on a cleaner to do the 15 hours unskilled work for them maximises the investment into that IT worker.

The Care Drain begins with the men. As women increasingly took up paid work again, the men did not increase their share of the domestic work. So now there is increasingly a third person (or a range of other people) - the low paid, immigrant woman, to do that ‘degrading’ work. The presence of ‘affordable’ immigrant domestic workers enables men to continue to avoid the ‘second shift’ and to provide the illusion of gender equality within the relationship of the employing couple. But in reality the gender inequality has just been shifted out outside that relationship and into a global relationship of migration and has a knock-on, very harsh, effect on families of the sending countries. A division of labour feminists critiqued when it was ‘local’ has now gone global. So we do now have wages for housework - but they are low wages paid to women who do not have any other choice but to do someone else’s housework - at a deep cost to their own families.

Remittances and the global economy

In times of economic crisis women ‘make ends meet’ (e.g. small subsistence plots of land), or make the hard choice to emigrate. As men loose their jobs, local markets collapse and governments withdraw social spending, developing alternative survival strategies becomes necessary, both for the families themselves and for the governments.16

For the women - migrating and sending back money to their families is often the only choice left to them. 34 to 54 percent of the Filipino population is sustained by remittances (money send back home). In general women tend to send back 50 percent of what they earn. This is one reason why governments encourage women to migrate for work, through employment schemes and even propaganda songs.

A World Bank report shows that "officially recorded remittances worldwide exceeded $232 billion in 2005. Of this, developing countries received $167 billion, more than twice the level of development aid from all sources. The report estimates that remittances sent through informal channels could add at least 50 percent to the official tally, making them the largest source of external capital in many developing countries. The report considered that it is plausible that in the coming years, official remittance flows will continue to rise at the 7 percent to 8 percent annual rate seen during the 1990s. These figures are for all remittances, but more women than men migrate in order to support families back home.

The countries receiving the most in recorded remittances are India ($21.7 billion), China ($21.3 billion), Mexico ($18.1 billion), France ($12.7 billion) and the Philippines ($11.6 billion). Those for which remittances account for the largest proportion of gross domestic product are Tonga (31 percent), Moldova (27.1 percent), Lesotho (25.8 percent), Haiti (24.8 percent) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (22.5 percent).

Remittances were larger than public and private capital inflows in 36 developing countries in 2004. In another 28 countries, they were larger than the earnings from the most important commodity export. In Mexico, for example, remittances are larger than foreign direct investment, and in Sri Lanka they are larger than tea exports. Remittances might also help smooth out the economic cycles of the recipient country. That is, remittances might rise when the recipient economy suffers a downturn in activity or macroeconomic shocks due to financial crisis, natural disaster or political conflict, because migrants may send more funds during hard times to help their families and friends.

On the national scale, by generating a steady stream of foreign exchange earnings, remittances can improve a country's creditworthiness for external borrowing, thus expanding access to capital and lowering borrowing costs. The report pointed out that often migrants are obliged to pay high fees when transferring funds. Many governments of countries that people emigrate from have schemes to facilitate women to migrate. Governments encourage migrant labour, sex workers and mail order brides. The Filipino government has legalised 'mail order bride' agencies.

Indonesia, along with many other countries, includes targets for the numbers of workers it hopes to send abroad in its five-year economic development plans. In the plan for 1999-2003, the target was 2.8 million workers.

So the private decision of a woman to go abroad to do domestic work is propping up not only the professionals and business in the receiving countries, but also the governments of the sending countries, the money traders such as western union and any number of people smugglers, employment agencies and pimps along the way.

Third world governments are often encouraged (by the IMF etc.) to develop their tourism and entertainment industries - meaning also a parallel sex industry. In Thailand, somewhere between one in 120 and one in 60 of the entire population are women working as prostitutes. One in 20 of those women are enslaved. Those who deal in prostitutes make a fortune. According to a CIA report, traffickers receive about $7000 dollars for each woman delivered to the US and the pimp gangs then get something like $215,000 dollars per month from her work. Prostitution is a growing industry - along with the growing international tourism industry. There are also many reports of

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18 [http://www.zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org), International migration can be an important tool in helping developing countries, affirmed a World Bank report published Nov. 16. Migrants and the money they send back home, remittances, is the main theme in the annual "Global Economic Prospects report for 2006."
maids, mail order brides and other domestic workers being trafficked, tricked and enslaved.

**Effects on families in sending countries**

Most migrating women have children. The average age of women migrants into the US is 29 and from countries where this usually means already having children. They cannot bring their children with them - for legal and economic reasons. More women than men migrants stay in the adopted countries.

There is a sort of economic chain reaction of the care crisis. One example is this: Rowena works in the US ($750 a month) and sends money back for her two children who live with her mother ($400 a month). But her mother also works, 14 hours a day as a teacher. So Anna de la Cruz comes in at 8am to cook, clean and care for the children ($50 a month), leaving her own teenage son in the care of her eighty-year-old mother in law.21

Many Governments and the local media of sending countries on one hand encourage migration, but at the same time vilify these women as 'bad mothers' creating a generation of delinquent children. This can be a stigmatisation of these families. Globalisation has lead to "ideas about gender and modernity that create large female workforces at the same time that ideologies of 'culture', 'authenticity' and national honour put increasing pressure on various communities to morally discipline working women".22

The fact that they cannot afford to, or legally cannot bring their own families, works in the favour of the employers - as the women will have more time and energy to give to their charges. They are more likely to be happy to live in the employing families home, meaning they are almost always on duty. One sample of live-in domestics in the UK found that 30 percent averaged an over 12-hour day.

Arlie Russell Hochschild writes about the fetishisation of the commodity of love, or "Globalisations pound of flesh". She looks at the affect on the children left behind, and makes the case that the loneliness and pain of these women means that they transfer huge amounts of love onto the children they are employed to look after. She says that love is 'an unfairly distributed resources - extracted from one place and enjoyed somewhere else'. Love does appear scarce and limited, like a mineral extracted from the earth". Ironically - if the women stayed in their origin countries they would not have the time to lavish the love they do on their charges in the 1st world. "The first world extracts love from the third world. But what is being extracted is partly produced or 'assembled' here; the leisure, the money, the ideology of the child, the intense loneliness and yearning for one's own children". 23

**Conclusion**

The number of immigrant women working in parallel to more developed and wealthy sectors and areas is numerically and economically very significant. They are enabling a development of long hours and stressful work in developing sectors, enabling women to do professional work and have a certain home life lifestyle and enabling the men to continue not doing much domestic work, whilst the professional couple maintain the illusion of gender equality - in reality just shifting the gender inequality onto the global market place, leaving a care crisis further down the line. The wages and conditions of the work reveals the low status or value accorded to this work. 30 years after the start of the wages for housework debate we do have wages for housework - and they are about $3 an hour.

The work is integrated into modern capitalism not only in terms of this necessity for the modern sectors, but also in terms of the work organisation of the domestic work. The increasing industrialisation through agencies, the work processes and the location - e.g. the growth in care homes and fast food outlets.

The remittances are vital for the global economy - for the survival of people in the receiving countries, for those governments, and for economies that rely on those countries having foreign income.

Although these women are often described as marginal, invisible and dis-empowered - the last

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two undoubtedly true in the case of live-in domesticics and nannies - there is also an intrinsic power these workers have. These are all jobs that have to be done where they are - so capital cannot re-locate in the case of a struggle for wage rises. It is also work which has to be done by humans and cannot really be done with less workers - so capital cannot industrialise in that sense - or provide a 'technological fix'. It is also work that simply has to be done.

Often we find examples of these women organising via NGOs or cultural groups. There is evidence that regular wage work can empower immigrant women - they learn the language better, have their own income, get better at accessing services available. Women tend to be more involved in community building and community activism. These trends suggest that women may emerge as more forceful and visible actors in class struggle. When looking for these potentials a lot depends on whether one is working in private home, or in a workplace. The isolation of the private home makes it a very hard place to organize collectively as workers. But there is also evidence that second generation immigrants tend to be those who struggle more than their parents.

There are some reports of collective struggle. On the 6 January 20,000 domestic workers in India went on a one-day strike with the Domestic Workers Union calling for recognition as official workers with the usual workers rights. There are also some struggles of maids in Hong Kong and much more work could be done of researching and supporting these struggles all over the world.

What is for sure is that global capitalism would not function without the huge amounts of labour done by this significant part of the class, the immigrant woman doing so-called 'domestic' tasks.

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**China in Revolt**

Western newspapers are full of articles on China. They show their fascination for China’s immense economic growth, the big investments, cheap labor... and present China as a threat to the Western World because of cheap labor, environmental hazards and China’s stance in the Taiwan question. On and off there is also an article on the growing social instability, workers’ struggles against the non-payment of wages, the working conditions, corruption... and peasant revolts against land-confiscation etc. This article gives some explanations why China is far from stable and why we might see further social explosions there.

**Social Struggles in the Chinese Modernization Process**

One of the most serious problems in China is still the peasant question. In just about 20 years rapid urbanization has reduced the agrarian population by 20 percent, but 60 percent of Chinese still live on the country-side. In other words: Nearly one third of the world’s villagers are Chinese! The peasants though are less and less able to make a living in agriculture. That is why nearly all young women and men from outlying provinces migrate to cities to work and just return home for the Spring Festival, the Chinese New Year. The British historian Hobsbawn called the proletarianization of millions and millions of Chinese peasants in just a decade the greatest transformation of class relations since the New Stone Age. The number of migrant workers is estimated between 100 to 200 million.

**Precarious stability and its limits**

That the rule of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) so far has not collapsed has to do with the still relatively egalitarian agrarian system, a "peasant socialism" unique in the world. The village administration allocates about 1 Mu (one 15th of a hector) of land to every Chinese peasant who has right of use. The state maintains ownership, though. This piece of land is the "life insurance" against hunger. Nearly all peasants who work in the city as day laborers leave the old people and children at home to till the fields.
This egalitarian agrarian system is the product of the 1980s' reform policies. The peasants paved the way for and benefited from these policies. After 1978 they spontaneously dissolved the people's communes, above all in the poor regions of provinces like Henan and Anhui, and allocated the state-owned land to the families. It took four years, until 1982, before the reform wing of the party around Deng Xiaoping adapted these policies. In 1978 he had still called the measures "anti-socialist." The party later legalized the family economy on state-owned ground and released the peasants from forced selling of grain to the state for extremely low prices. After the successful agrarian reforms, the CCP expanded the market economy step by step to other areas of society.

Because of population growth, the high tax burden and today's low market prices for grains, "peasant socialism" reached its limits. Chinese media and social scientists constantly address the issue of the "burden of the peasants." In the last few years, the Chinese government has come up with more than thirty resolutions to lower this burden and stop arbitrary imposition of fines - so far without success. China does not have a modern tax system the state could use for making financial adjustments between the booming east coast and the poor provinces on the Yellow River and in the west. The burden of the peasants is growing every year because after the extreme decentralization the village bureaucracy and the schools are forced to find their own financial resources. So the administration of a poor village often cannot do anything else but ask the peasants to pay for all the cadres' and teachers' wages. And due to "nepotism" the bureaucracy has immensely expanded in spite of the reduction of state's role.

**Who wins the peasants, wins China**

Local peasant unrest is mostly sparked by land issues. Cadres confiscate land for dams or industrial projects that the state had given to peasants with a 30 year lease. The law says that peasants should get compensation but that often does not happen. Then the peasants rebel against this "land robbery."

The new Chinese government under Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao understands the explosiveness of the problem. Mao’s sentence, "who wins the peasants, wins China" is often quoted. Plenty of literature on the problems of peasants, villages and agriculture show this attention. Now the government has cut the agrarian tax, taking the weight off peasants’ back. Whether this cut will reduce the burden is questionable because the village administrations often have no other choice then to rely on other levies. At its last Congress, the CCP announced that the peasants’ rights of use would be better protected.

The central government in Beijing does not want a general change of policies, like allocating more state's resources to the countryside. Two examples: The percentage of public spending going into health and education is far lower than during the 1980s, a policy mostly affecting peasants. In 2003 only ten percent had health insurance (in the cities 19.5 percent). After the collapse of the collective health system following the dissolution of the peoples' communes and the subsequent decentralization, becoming sick is a high risk for poverty and this also leads to the rise of miracle healers and "sects" promising cures to ill people. Furthermore, despite laws guaranteeing nine years of mandatory schooling without any fees, in the villages the number of school dropouts is rising because without "illegal" school fees the teachers' wages cannot be paid.

**Social apartheid in China's streets**

Outside their villages peasants face not only social disadvantages but also state discrimination - a heritage from Mao Zedong's model of socialism. For over twenty years, from 1961 to the mid-1980s, the CP prevented any urbanization of the society. The party tied the peasants to their parcels of land and the workers to factories through the registration-system (hukou). Between 1949 and 1978 the ratio between city and countryside and between workers and peasants barely shifted. With the development of the market and the virtual loosening of the hukou-system in the 1990s, the separation between urban and rural society has shrunk dramatically. Some discrimination remains, though: Those registered under the peasant-hukou or that of another city, cannot in Beijing, for instance, settle for a long time, their children cannot attend kindergarden or school, and they will find it impossible to work in a state-owned enterprise with
social benefits. A peasant’s child from the province Henan or Shanxi has to get better test results at the universities’ entrance examination than a child from Beijing, and will in the end go to a lesser university. Many city-dwellers, including workers in state-owned enterprises, are against the abolition of the *hukou* because they fear competition from the villagers and a rise in crime. But despite the *hukou*-system, the cities are growing rapidly. In Beijing and Shanghai there are millions of unregistered people.

The migrant workers mostly accept worse working conditions and the discrimination because they can earn much more in the cities than in the countryside. Their families at home live on the money they transfer there. Since most of the migrant workers have no working contract they are often victims of fraud.

**State workers face bankruptcy**

The core work force in state industry is the main loser in the ongoing economic boom. For a long time the Party spared them. Unlike the "shock therapy" in Russia, in China privatization of the state enterprises was carried out slowly. Credit from state banks prevented rapid bankruptcy of unprofitable state enterprises. The modernization of the Chinese banking system is supposed to change that practice. Then, millions of state workers will be faced with ruin after getting sacked. Already in 2002 urban unemployment was estimated between seven and twenty percent. The sacked state workers cannot compete with the migrant workers and are not qualified for better jobs in private companies.

The state workers, kind of "mobilized for service" by the state, enjoyed a range of privileges in China. Unlike intellectuals and party cadres they were rarely victims of the "Cultural Revolution's" campaigns (1966-1977). And in contrast to the vast majority of Chinese, the peasants, merchants and contract workers, state workers claimed accident and pension insurance, got cheap housing and reserved placement for their children in kindergarten. Since China lacks centralized public social benefits, state workers received them through their workplace. With privatization these privileges were abolished or are threatened.

Hence, in older heavy industry centers like Manchuria, Sichuan or Henan mass protests have already taken place against unemployment and the selling-off of the state enterprise’s pension and welfare-funds. Since the media is forbidden from covering the events, the extent and content of workers’ unrest and strikes is unknown. The Ministry of Public Security states that the number of collective protests, including strikes, has risen from 8.700 (1993) to 32.000 (1999). It is striking, that so far links haven’t been made between the state workers’ protests the state workers and those of migrant workers. They are still poles apart. Most observers believe that the majority of strikes have a local character, originating in single work units. The workers rarely turn against the political system as such. They demand continued employment, payment of pensions or dismissal of corrupt managers or cadres. They repeatedly refer to the high ideological status of the proletariat in the past. "Haven’t you told us for 50 years that we are the vanguard of society?", is the striking state workers’ reply to the Party.

The state reacts to the protests with "the carrot and the stick". The alleged ringleaders get arrested and can be sent to prison for years on charges of "breach of the peace." After 1989 the People’s Armed Police was trained and equipped as a special anti-riot force. However, at the same time the affected regions got financial aid. The state-controlled union often tries to mediate between the state and the workers. In order to strengthen state control "neighborhood" organizations (*shequ*) are formed. One of their tasks is to pay its members a small social welfare stipend, only to those with the right *hukou*, of course. That is supposed to solve social problems locally. Chinese labor-NGOs also try to stand up for the workers by means of the legal system.

**Afraid of "chaos"

Thanks to development in China today only one out of five people - and not one out of three as in 1970 - suffers from malnutrition. The winners in the Chinese economic miracle are not a small minority but hundreds of millions of people. In the cities large numbers of people are on a consumption binge. Nearly all Chinese eat, dress, live and are housed better than before the 1979 reforms.
There are also regions in China where the urbanization and the proletarianization of the peasants proceeds successfully, in the sense of a bourgeois modernization. In the provinces of the east coast (Jiangsu, Zhejiang) the petty trades peasants were doing on the side long ago became their main source of income. The transition from village to city is smooth.

These facts, nevertheless, cannot hide the social inequality. For the first time since the beginning of the reforms in 1979 the number of people having to survive on less than one US-dollar per day is again growing. In the cities there is a "new poverty." China’s Gini Coefficient, an international standard for social inequality increased from 0.33 (1980) to 0.46 (2000), and therefore reached „dangerous“ dimensions. While in western capitalism mostly capitalists get rich, in China besides the entrepreneurs it is the cadres and the public officials. Traditionally, in the “Middle Kingdom” holding office involves wealth. High sums are collected for nearly every stamp, act of administration and other “favors.” The Chinese government has, at least in its propaganda, reacted to the growing social divide: A "harmonious society" should be built. Deng Xiaoping’s old phrase, "Some get rich first and others get rich later," was substituted with the slogan of "common prosperity."

Despite the discontent over the Party’s dictatorship, all classes in China seem to be afraid of "chaos," i.e. a weak state. Criminal gangs and secret societies are on an upsurge. Zhou Yongkan, the Minister of Public Security, called the religious movement Falungong the biggest threat to stability. The movement, the government calls it a "sect," has according to its own statements more members than the CCP.

It is still open what character the diverse social unrest in China will take. But whatever the form, it will surely take on global importance. A crisis in China could throw the international financial markets and the whole world economy into a deep recession. Enough reason for an internationalist left to focus more on the struggles in China.

Anton Pam

Information on workers' struggles in China

Websites
Asian Labour: http://www.asianlabour.org/
Anita Chan Website: http://rspas.anu.edu.au/~anita/
Wildcat on struggles in Asia: http://www.umwaelzung.de

Books
Kupfer, Kristin (Hrsg.): Sozialer Sprengstoff in China? Dimensionen sozialer Probleme in der Volksrepublik; Focus Asien 17; Essen, Germany (http://www.asienhaus.de/index.php)

The following text was first published in German on Indymedia. [January 16, 2006, http://de.indymedia.org/2006/01/136589.shtml]. For more information see the article on Gate Gourmet and the workers’s struggle in the last issue of this newsletter, ppnews #4 [http://www.prol-position.net/nl/2005/04/gourmet].

Workers’ Struggle at Gate Gourmet is Getting Harder

The opponents are Texas Pacific Group and LTU (=REWE). A two hours long blockade at the 100th day of strike puts Gate Gourmet and LTU under distress.

Saturday, January 14, the strike counter at the striker's tent counted the one hundredth strike day at Gate Gourmet. The union announced „No
reason for celebration, but for protest” on its web-
site (in German: http://www.ngg.net). The people
understood the message.

The supporters gathered at 7 am, not at 1 pm as
it was announced, at the strikers’ tent to express
their solidarity to the strikers. They did it practi-
cally through blocking the exits. In this way they
stopped the catering deliveries to the airplanes,
which where already waiting at the maneuvering
area, for about two hours.1 Especially explosive on
this morning was the airplanes were going to go
on long-distance flights. Short-distance flights can
leave without food, but it is not possible to let air-
planes leave without catering to South Africa or
the Caribbean.

Later, you could see the success of the blockade
at the schedules at the terminals: The flights to
South Africa, Dominican Republic, USA, and Ja-
maica had delays between one and two hours (LT
674, LT446, LT908 and LT400). But Gate Gourmet
had prepared to protect the delivery from block-
adcs. At the last blockade on Christmas Eve (De-
cember 24, Christmas Eve in Germany), airplanes
left two hours late because the trucks had been
blocked. A few short-distance flights had delayed
departures as well.

The security crew of the company Chevalier
from Krefeld was doubled. Chevalier had distin-
guished themselves again with brutal whippings.
An emergency exit through the parking lot was
arranged, the trucks had simply to pass over a few
thin posts. Obviously a coordinated procedure
was arranged with the police. However, it didn’t
work this morning. A brutal whipping by the se-
curity crew enabled seven trucks to break through
under the threat of peoples’ health and passed the
parking lot to get to the access road to the maneu-
vering area. But also the supporters were flexible
and since a few blocked the main entrance, where
still two trucks were waiting, the others blocked
the road and stopped the trucks until 9:15 a.m.

Even when the last three trucks backed up to
pass a makeshift gate to enter the maneuvering
area (gate 47), which must not be used by Gate

1 More information (in German) can be found at:
http://germany.indymedia.org/2006/01/136508.shtml,
http://germany.indymedia.org/2006/01/136552.shtml,
http://www.fau.org/artikel/art_060115-195028
„lean-restructuring-program“. Shortly after the takeover of Gate Gourmet, they sent the notorious business consultant McKinsey and with the goal to sell the business at a profit in no later than five to seven years. In the case of Gate Gourmet, it means TPG will hold the business for at the most three years and until then the company needs to be restructured. That means, they have to tighten the exploitation conditions as much as possible to get an extraordinary income return for the stockholders through resale.

The last election campaign brought this kind of investment company more into public. The Social Democrats (and specially Müntefering) put the attention on this populist and nationalistic „locust“ campaign. Of course, they did so without mentioning that it was the red-green coalition, that attracted companies with tax reforms and relieved these kinds of businesses. With the differences between „good“ and „bad“ capital, the SPD tried to use the spread of outrage against capitalist conditions for their own interests and to avoid a more radical critic on capitalism.

In reality, Private-Equity-Companies (PECs) do the dirty jobs for the capitalists, for that they are allowed to raise their profits a little. As an anonymous investment business, which buys and resells quickly, PECs don't need to take care for their image, that could be damaged through their brutal reorganization methods. That is why PECs don't care about bad press and ignore public critique. That leads to a crisis of union strategies. In face of the poor possibilities to use economic pressure, the unions use verbal and symbolic solidarity and rely on publicity. But this doesn't impress Texas Pacific Group. The only thing that could put them under pressure, are economic losses.\footnote{2 Texas Pacific got known here through it procedure at the bath-armature producer Grohe. Recently a documentary was broadcast by ARD: „Und du bist raus. Wie Investoren die Traditionsfirma Grohe auspressen“(And you are out. How investors squeeze the traditional company Grohe). It shows the procedure of TPG. In German: \url{http://www.wdr.de/tv/dokumentation/unddubistraus.html}. See for more background information in German about the general strategy the articles by Werner Rügemer in Junge Welt: \url{http://www.jungewelt.de/2005/02-22/005.php}, \url{http://www.jungewelt.de/2005/02-23/003.php}}

The background information is important to understand to know why Gate Gourmet, i.e. TPG, acts like it does and demands the ultimate cost reduction of ten percent. During the negotiations on January 5, even veteran unionists were shocked by the TPG procedure, which they hadn't known before. It’s time to wake up to reality. The attorney from Munich announced he would present a ready made collective bargaining contract to sign. If the union wouldn't sign the contract he was asked to end the strike by legal means. What ever that means. Imaginably, it is only the attempt to use the police for a more repressive action because the strikers are - now, less than ever! - not willing to take changes for the worse.

During the strike it became clear that LTU, as the main customer, supports Gate Gourmet. The attempt of the seven trucks breaking through the blockade on January 14, through using the parking lot of LTU, was prepared days before. With the introduction of the trade corporation REWE at LTU they are demanding the decrease of personnel costs. This demand is a package worth 16 Million euros. They just started collective bargaining negotiations at LTU, where the company demands similar cuts like Gate Gourmet with its workers. Some LTU workers realize that they may need to open up their strikers tent right across from the tent of their striking Gate Gourmet colleagues soon. If this is going to happen, then they could overcome the division of the airport workers which was created through the many relocations and company divisions which had happened the last few years.

**Secondary picketing is necessary!**

Facing these divisions, it will be more important to think about mobile and flexible forms of strikes in the coming years anyway. In other countries, they are discussed and practiced as „secondary picketing“ already. If a single staff can't create enough pressure, then other workers from outside have to build effective pickets to put capital under pressure. The blockade on January 14 was such an attempt of „secondary picketing“ and this should be an example. The strike at Gate Gourmet shows how the single capitalist LTU airport company, and Gate Gourmet work together and stand together to break the resistance of the workers. It’s time for the working class to stand together again.
In case of the temp agency Goldberg and Avci from Duisburg, which had sent the vast majority of the scabs, it was put under pressure from outside (the last time at a demo at Friday 13th, in front of the company, following a call up of WASG („new” left party) and ver.di (union) locals). So Avci gave in and removed his extra temp workers from Gate Gourmet. Disgusted, he told his critics, „the big deal would now be done by others”, it is the temp agency GMA from Düsseldorf.3 We will see if they are going to be happy with this job.

czech car industry

The following article was written by comrades from the Czech Republic. Following their analysis of the strike at Škoda (see ppnews #2, 5/2005, http://www.prol-position.net/ml/2005/02/skoda) they investigated the development of the car industry in the Czech Republic more thoroughly, concentrating on Škoda/Volkswagen, TPCA (Toyota Peugeot Citroëen Automobile in Kolín) - formed the backbone of this sector, with a significant number of new supplying firms clustering around (for instance Bosch, Behr, Visteon, Continental, Siemens).

The suppliers do not produce solely for the domestic car manufacturers, but are both part of traditional car production chains in Western Europe and new car factories in the east, for instance those set up in Slovakia (Volkswagen, PSA, Kia). Recently the South Korean corporation Hyundai announced that its first European factory would be built in Ostrava. These companies are either expanding their production in the Czech Republic, or they actually shift it here from Western Europe.

The car industry amounts to about 20 percent of industrial production of the Czech Republic. Overall 85 percent of car production is intended for export, which makes up 21 percent of the total Czech export. More than 130,000 workers are employed in the car industry. In certain regions (Liberec and its surrounding areas, or Southern Bohemia) this sector comprises more than 75 percent of all investments. In the Liberec region 91 out of 100 crowns invested goes to the car industry – a concentration that is clearly motivated by the proximity of Mladá Boleslav.

Supplying firms form the most important part of the Czech car industry. They employ more workers and, taken as a whole, they reach higher revenues than the actual car producers. They take a 56 percent share of the sector’s production. These companies manufacture not only for the car factories in the Czech Republic, the main portion of their production is directed to other EU countries. For example, Ford, which does not have any direct production established here, uses components delivered by about 30 companies based in the Czech Republic. In 2004, Volkswagen (not including Škoda Auto) was delivered components worth one billion euros. Some of the supplying firms are Czech based, the majority, however, were established through extensions or shifts of production from abroad.

The lack of qualified workers has lately become the major problem for the car industry in the

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Czech Republic. It is presented as the main obstacle to its further development. Many workers in the newly constructed plants come not only from Slovakia, but also from the Ukraine and some even from Poland. The dismantling of the welfare state is aimed at forcing people to work, in these plants among others, people who have hitherto refused to do so because of the work’s crushing nature and low wages.

Škoda: "A discontent in the locality"?

Contrary to Volkswagen itself, Škoda does not seem to be facing any major problems. In 2004 it reached a record profit of 3.5 billion crowns (in 2003 it was "only" 1.48 billion). Whereas in 2001 the company had to impose obligatory leaves of absence and suspend production because of insufficient sales, this year, on the other hand, it imposes extra-shifts (accepted by the trade-unions) in order to meet allegedly increased demand. At the same time the management members admits that the main causes for the record profits in 2004 were the reduction of costs and changes in logistics (for instance reducing the stock of reserve supplies), rather than a good market situation.

Sales in 2004 went up only marginally from the previous year (451,675 vehicles sold in 2004 as opposed to 449,758 in 2003). In the Czech Republic and Central Europe Škoda even encountered a drop in sales; the increases come from better sales in Western and Eastern Europe and in Asia. The Octavia model was the one driving the sales up, all other models (Fabia, Fabia Combi, Fabia Sedan, Octavia Combi, and Superb) dropped in sales. Škoda hopes to increase its sales more significantly by introducing its new Roomster model that is to be produced in the Kvasiny plant starting 2006.

Škoda is the biggest Czech exporter, just as it is one of the biggest employers. It's main facility in Mladá Boleslav is supplemented by factories in Vrchlabí and Kvasiny in eastern Bohemia. In Mladá Boleslav and its surroundings it is not only the main employer, but virtually an industrial centre, around which revolves the entire life of the town. At the end of 2004 the plant employed 24,561 people, 20,897 as permanent staff. The majority of employees work in Mladá Boleslav, since Vrchlabí and Kvasiny Škoda employ just about 2,300 workers altogether. A significant number of workers come from Slovakia, a part of them even from Poland. It is these workers who are very often hired by recruitment agencies and who were used in the past as a "shock absorber" during occasionally occurring lay-offs.

Škoda has opened assembly plants in Bosna (Sarajevo), Ukraine (Uzghorod) and in India. It is planning to open an assembly line in Kazakhstan, a big one is also expected to be built in China (Shanghai). Škoda’s most optimistic prediction for its Chinese production, to begin in 2007, is just 40,000 vehicles per year. The plant is expected to employ 5,000 or 6,000 workers. In India, as well as the Octavia model, also the Superb are assembled, and Fabias are under consideration.

All these Škoda plants abroad do not function as independent production units. They are, in fact, dependent on exact and timely supplies of component parts from Mladá Boleslav. In this main factory there is a final assembly line (as is the case with TPCA in Kolín), but it also produces engines, transmissions and other components. These components are made not only for Škoda purposes and its assembly plants abroad, but also for the rest of the Volkswagen corporation. The "supplying" character of Mladá Boleslav facility looks likely to increase.

In 2004 Škoda had 153.5 billion crowns in revenue. Most of it was made abroad. Before the launch of TPCA, Škoda was responsible for 8 percent of the exports from the Czech Republic. The biggest markets for Škoda products are in Germany, followed by the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Great Britain, Italy and Poland.

Dozens of supplying firms are connected to Škoda’s production and in 2004 they delivered parts worth 1.8 billion euros, 400 million more than the preceding year. There are speculations about using more suppliers from other parts of Eastern Europe in the future. That is where many companies settle after not finding enough qualified workers in the Czech Republic anymore. The suppliers operating in the Czech Republic cover 60 percent of Škoda’s demand.

In spring 2005 there was a three-hour strike at Škoda (each shift was on strike for an hour).1 In Mladá Boleslav it was accompanied by a demon-

striction of 10,000 people. The main demand was a wage-increase in the light of the company’s record profits. Škoda’s bargaining power was diminished by the lack of a qualified workforce that had begun to be felt by the Czech car industry and by the necessity of keeping up continuous production at a time when Škoda was doing relatively well. The management made concessions and approved a 7 percent wage increase, maintaining the 13th annual salary, increases of bonuses for afternoon/night shifts, and the payment of lump-sum bonuses.

Even though the workers’ starting position was strong, this conflict did not extend beyond the limits set by the trade-union leadership. The only conflict that developed beyond such limits was a "wildcat" work-stoppage in June 2000, when several hundred workers in the Fabia’s welding shop in Mladá Boleslav protested against unbearably high temperatures in the shop. In October of the same year there was a protest meeting of workers from Fabia’s assembly and expedition lines, targeted against work overload at the production lines. There was one more protest meeting at the same place and for the same reasons in July 2001. At the beginning of 2003 workers repeatedly refused to come to work for extra night shifts. The whole thing, however, was more about trade-union tactics for collective bargaining, than an expression of autonomous workers’ resistance. Nonetheless, even back then the trade-union representatives warned against a "discontent in the locality" that could be accompanied by an intentional destruction of cars by the workers.

**TPCA: "Work shall be blessed"**

Škoda has been making cars for decades and Volkswagen only took over in 1991 and "modernized" it. TPCA, on the other hand, is a typical example of a factory built on the "green field" close to the town of Kolin. In the fields adjacent to the factory an obelisk was raised displaying a car and an inscription in Latin "Ut sit labor" ("Work Shall Be Blessed"). Originally a BMW plant was supposed to be erected there. However, BMW eventually decided to build the new factory next to Leipzig in Germany. The way to Kolin was thus opened for the consortium of Toyota-Peugeot-Citroën. But TPCA was not merely following the cheap labor force. It was granted generous incentives from both the state and the town of Kolin. The town agreed to pay not only the complete development of the industrial zone, but also the costs of traffic route extensions, sound barriers and other environmental compensations. It also pledged to build new housing units and other adequate infrastructure. As a result of all of this Kolin incurred debts of hundreds of millions of crowns that it will not pay back till 2019. The state committed itself to speed up the construction of the D11 highway which, together with a feeder road made specifically for TPCA, should become the vital thoroughfare for the factory. Altogether, the state agreed to provide incentives equaling 15 percent of the value of the entire investment.

TPCA’s decision to invest 23 billion crowns was major news for many months: the terminology employed included "the biggest investment", "the most modern car factory in Europe", "rescue for the unemployed", even a "rescue for the economy". In Kolin itself housing prices went up immediately, the schools competed in offering educational adjustments fitting the factory’s needs, the local press was covering constantly all the events regarding the plant.

When production started in spring 2005 it became clear that its effects will be anything but miraculous. Already during the construction period the noise from passing trucks became so unbearable to citizens of Velký Osek (one of the small towns adjacent to the factory) that they threatened to block the transport routes. In one part of Kolin, where new flats for TPCA workers and a Tesco hypermarket were being built, people actually did take to the streets and organized a blockade. In another part of Kolin, the residents of Ovčárecká street founded a non-governmental organization and used it for legal battles against noise pollution, water vanishing from wells, and other negative environmental impacts of the factory. Their street became a main exit-road for TPCA. At first TPCA refused to pay any compensation, because it could create a precedent case for other routes through which the plant is supplied. However, when the NGO threatened to bring up some discrepancies with building permits, the town hall retreated and allowed the resident to have their windows soundproofed, their walls insulated; and it agreed to build noise blocking walls around the
road. Even though the town of Kolín is paying for these alterations, there are rumors that TPCA is actually the source of money. So far, all conflicts have been resolved peacefully. Nonetheless, there has been a lot of tension accompanying the plant since its very beginning.

When the production will reach full capacity, TPCA should produce 300,000 cars per year, that is 100 cars per employee. At first sight it is a big number, especially when compared to 18 cars per employee at Škoda. The high number of cars produced per employee in TPCA could be partially put down to new methods of the organization of work and production, namely exerting more pressure on the workers. At the same time, we have to understand that TPCA only does the final assembly of cars, whereas in Škoda there are also production facilities for engines, transmissions, and other components. According to official figures about 75 percent of components for TPCA come from suppliers based in the Czech Republic. One truck can contain 10.5 cubic meters of components. When the production runs at full extent, 1,100 fully loaded trucks will have to supply the factory everyday. More than 100 supplying firms (about 60 of them Japanese and a similar number of them from Western Europe) followed TPCA to the Czech Republic. They have the intention to work not only for TPCA, but also for Škoda and some other car factories that are about to begin production in Slovakia. About 70 to 80 percent of TPCA's production should be exported via railroad (95 percent of the entire production is destined for export).

The assembly line in TPCA is organized in such a way that one Toyota Aygo, one Peugeot 107 and one Citroen C1 leave it one after one, one car every minute; 1,100 cars every day (this level should be achieved by spring 2006). Any worker at any part of the line has the capacity (indeed, an obligation according to the internal norms of the enterprise) to stop the entire line immediately upon discovering a defect. The point of the measure is to involve the workers in the quality control process. Whereas at the moment it is integral to their exploitation, will they be able to use this competence against capital?

Another significant element in the organization of work is a very advanced standardization of workers' operations. It reflects the aim of a smooth and conflict-less production process. The management goes so far as to make their workers pass training on how to hold a hammer correctly to render their operation more effective.

The rate of unemployment in Kolín, which has been over 10 percent for years, remained almost unaffected by TPCA's start. Even though, at first, the deep drop of the unemployment rate in Kolín was one of the main propagandistic promises. In the end, only about 40 percent of the employees come from Kolín and its surrounding areas. In the traditionally "well-off" region of Central Bohemia it is hard to motivate enough newcomers by 14,000 Czech crowns of gross salary. The majority of workers come from northern Moravia, Slovakia and Ukraine. Even though TPCA organized a massive recruiting campaign in the areas most hit by high unemployment, it still had problems to find a sufficient number of employees. TPCA did not even ask of the new employees to be adequately qualified and was offering on-the-spot training.

The first shift was recruited within a reasonable time-frame; however, recruiting for the second shift took significantly longer and the third one was completed only in October, 2005. 3,000 jobs were planned, but so far there are only 2,400 employees (TPCA was said to create 10,000 jobs if we count the suppliers). After all three shifts were formed, the working teams were mixed in such a way as to have the same proportion of experienced and new employees in every shift, apparently in order to keep the same level of productivity in each shift.

When just the first shift was operational, the work was only four days a week, but it was from 6:30 am till 5:11 pm. The curious working hours were derived by dividing the working hours for shift based enterprises, 38.75 hours weekly, by 4. With all three shifts in place, the factory is running 6 days a week, with a break from Saturday 5:11 pm till Sunday 6:30 pm.

One of the main ways to make the jobs seem attractive was the possibility to get a company flat. The Kolín township committed itself to building 850 of them. The delays in the construction, however, resulted in the fact that many workers had to live in very inadequate dormitories (one cabinet in
the room, shared bathrooms in the hallways) and pay about 3,700 Czech crowns for one bed in three- to four-bed rooms. TPCA contributes 1,500 Czech crowns for accommodation, another 500 Czech crowns for commuting. If an employee decides to move to Kolín with the whole family, it offers a one time contribution of 10,000 Czech crowns.

The problems with accommodation are said to be one of the main reason why every month about 50 or 60 people leave the factory. Nonetheless, we should not ignore the extreme amount of stress the workers are confronted with.

"I seriously don’t like to change jobs, but at this point I am even unable to solve a cross-word puzzle. And in no time I would become a total jerk," one young female worker said about the reasons that lead her to leave the job. She is a graduate of a business college who used to work for a car dealer until she was lured by TPCA's campaign, that promised an entry-level wage of 16,500 Czech crowns, a flat and a whole-life perspective. Now she lives in a dormitory, because with the gross wage of 14,000 Czech crowns she cannot afford a flat for 8,000 Czech crowns. She works at the components' quality control line. When a component arrives, she puts an iron hook at the weld spot and hits it with a hammer. If the weld does not break up, the component can go further along the line. "I am required to hold the hammer in the left hand and the hook in the right one. There is no way I could switch hands. If I did a monitor would appear and warn me that I am breaking the rules of the work operation." If the line stops and it is not an official break, she has to keep working, that is she has to take a broom and sweep her part of the floor even if it is completely clean. If she would resist that procedure "they would send me a letter of rebuke stating I am not sufficiently conformable." When she returned to work after being sick for a month "they put me on a different job, among entirely strange people. Actually, I had to start from scratch." She described certain signs that are displayed in the shops, for instance: "I wear a cheerful, vigorous and smiling face." "They always make us socialize and communicate. In the end, the boss of our shop gets 10,000 crowns and we all go to a pub where we stuff ourselves with food and get drunk for the money destined for communication among employees." The system of permanent mobilization is leads to stupefaction and results in docility.

Other workers also criticize the organization and the speed of work. "It is an unbelievable drill; we place bolt nuts on the wheels, for one hour straight, always in exactly the same way. And we do it for only 14,000 crowns of gross wage, whereas in France the electricity industry and the car industry are among the best paid jobs." Such were the complaints of a 36 year old worker from eastern Bohemia. The quality of accommodation is also criticized severely; the workers do not have fridges or a kitchen-stove for cooking. They do not get to go out in town - at six they get to their dormitory and have no time, money or energy for a social life. The evenings spent in cheap pubs are the only means of relaxation. Another worker from Ostrava, who earns up to 20,000 Czech crowns monthly, spends 4,000 in a pub. Another 4,000 goes for the accommodation and trips back home where he brings 8,000 to feed the four members of his family. "I am only staying here with a vision of promotion. Maybe once we will have wages comparable to Škoda, when the trade union will kick in," he says.

Indeed, there is a trade union in TPCA already, but there is no need to succumb to any illusions about its nature - the founding of the OS KOVO local was actively facilitated by the plant's management. On the other hand, even commentators from the mainstream press agree that more demands for higher wages are only a matter of time. For example, during the strike in Škoda in spring 2005, the journalists immediately began to investigate the atmosphere in the TPCA plant in order to find out if similar a conflict would emerge there. It seems clear, following the workers' statements, that they are well aware of the fact that the wages at Škoda (or even in the car factories in the West) are somewhat better and the low wage level at TPCA cannot remain immutable.

Suppliers

More than 300 suppliers (at least two thirds of foreign capital) form the main part of the Czech car industry; in respect of their 56 percent share in the industry’s output, number of employees, and share in total revenues. Japanese companies can il-
I illustrate this: of all 57 Japanese companies in the Czech Republic, 34 manufacture directly for the car industry and represent 70 percent of all Japanese investment here. It is said that every third German supplier has a facility in Eastern and Central Europe; there are 85 of them in the Czech Republic. There is a complex network of supplying firms connected at different nodes to the production chain making the sector quite vulnerable to disruptions.

Despite its importance, it is quite difficult to analyze the class composition in these firms. One of the reasons is their relatively obscure existence as opposed to the spotlighted whole-cars producers, which results in a lack of press and official coverage. Moreover, so far there have been no open struggles in supplying firms that could attract the attention of the press.

In many cases, these firms are working for Czech based car producers (Škoda, TPCA). However, they also supply other producers, especially in Western Europe. Strong ties are also emerging to Kia and PSA in Slovakia.

Among the biggest suppliers we can name Continental in Otrokovice (Moravia) that employs 4,500 workers and has become the biggest European producer of tires for personal vehicles. Another important supplier is Bosch, which makes components for diesel engines in Jihlava and employs 5,800 people. In another of its factories in České Budějovice there are 2,000 workers who make car components. Apparently the customers include all major European car factories, but a part of production is also exported to Asian and South American producers.

To name a few other suppliers in the Czech Republic, we can note Autopal in Nový Jičín that is owned by Visteon company and has 4,500 employees. Siemens Automotive in Frenštát (1,200 employees), Kiekert in Přelouč (1,400 employees); the list could go on.

Instead of a Conclusion

Much has to be done if we are to get beyond a mere "situation report" on the car industry in the Czech Republic or Central and Eastern Europe as a whole. Only a limited amount of information can be extracted from the official press and statistics, even though we could not advance without them. Light needs to be shed on where there are points of tensions and the technical composition of the industry. Is there a class recomposition underway? Direct inquires with workers themselves could help to breach this information barrier, while at the same time they could help to disseminate knowledge and share experiences among workers of various firms. At this point we can safely assert that since at least the end of the 1990s, the car industry has been the prime "industrializer" and the focal point of accumulation in Central and Eastern Europe. Sadly, that is the capitalist part of the story, and whether the sector is still central from the working class point of view, we cannot say.

under construction

Struggles of Asian Workers in the Middle East and Oil-Producing Countries

Introduction

In the last months there have been various struggles of Asian workers in the oil-producing countries, mainly in the construction sector. The construction and the domestic sector (see other article in this newsletter) are two of the main sectors of global proletarian migration, also due to the very nature of their product, which can not be re-located to the so-called low wage countries. The fact that workers from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Sri Lanka struck together during some of the conflicts shows their importance for a new class composition. Their struggles already had a noticeable impact on the labour relations in several countries of the Middle East, Arab Gulf and other oil-producing regions, e.g. governments having felt obliged to change labour laws accord-

ing to ‘international standards’ and to officially re-buke and black-list companies for retarding wage payments. In Azerbaijan the wage increase obtained by the migrant proletarians instigated the local oil workers to strike for higher salaries themselves. Struggles of Filipino and other Asian workers in Iraq disrupted accommodation and catering of the US troops. All in all, these struggles take place in some of the global capitalist hot spots and might be able to inspire the workers struggles in the various countries of origin. In the following we try to give a broad overview on some of the conflict zones.

**General situation in the Arab Gulf countries**

Thirty-five million people live in the six states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.) Of these, 13 million or 37 percent are foreign-born workers and their families. In the United Arab Emirates, foreign labourers make up around 85 percent of the four million people. In 2004 alone, Alkhazraji said the government issued 500,000 visas for incoming workers - a 20 percent increase in the country’s work force. Nearly 98 percent of private-sector workers in the Emirates are foreigners. In the overall population, expatriates far outnumber local Arabs. In the flashy emirate of Dubai, foreigners make up more than 80 percent of the city’s 1.5 million residents.

While the migrants in the states of the GCC reportedly send some $30 billion home annually and their earnings represent an important source of foreign exchange for a number of Asian and African governments, more than half of them earn a monthly wage of less than US$400. Without rights in a foreign land and generally with no or poor Arab language skills, migrants are often forced to work long working-hours. Another source of abuse is the indenture-style relations that foreign-workers often enter into with labour-recruitment companies. Workers from overseas are often recruited by specialised agencies or "sponsors" directly involved with the local employers. Agencies frequently take commissions from the immigrant workers that amount to considerable sums, depending on the nature of the job. When asked about the visa procedure, Mani, an Indian employed in Oman said, "I had to pay 800 Omani Riyals (US$2,078) to my sponsor to get my papers and visa done. And after two years, I have to pay another 110 Riyals (US$286) to renew my visa. There are instances where some people, who were unable to make that payment initially, pay nearly half of their monthly salary to their sponsors directly as a bond." In Oman, Indian-born workers make up half of the country’s 1 million overseas workers. Salaries for overseas workers are known to be far less than for Omani nationals, though still from two to five times higher than for the equivalent job in India. Asked about the working conditions Mani added, "I earn 70 Riyals (US$182) a month. I don't have to pay for accommodation and transport since I have got a small room where I work. Thinking of those who have to work the same amount of hours in the hot sun of 40-50 C° on construction sites for just 45-65 Riyals (US$116-$170), I consider myself having a bit more luck.'

These conditions let to an increase of conflicts. According to official figures from the United Arab Emirates’ Labour Ministry, there were 41 cases of labour disputes reported during the last months of 2005. The Ministry received 5,486 complaints, in 2005, from workers against employers over non-payment of wages. In Dubai the unpaid migrant workers have organized 18 strikes in 2005, involving more than 10,000 workers. The Labour Ministry of the UAE felt obliged to announce a blacklist of employers in October 2005. The announcement was significant because the offenders include some of the Emirates' top companies, which are owned by members of the royal family. The Labour Minister said the ongoing protests - which have seen thousands of angry labourers block highways and busy streets - was damaging the image of one of the Middle East’s most prosperous countries. "The labour strikes are the warning bell that the International Labour Organisation (ILO) had long ago cautioned Gulf countries from," ILO country representative in Kuwait, Thabet al-Harun, told in a press conference. On the backdrop of a rising militancy of the workers, the political class in the Gulf countries become convinced of the necessity of modern conflict management: The Saudi Shura (consultative) Council has issued a law allowing "workers committees," Harun said, while Oman has told the ILO it plans
to allow trade unions. And Qatar introduced a law last year granting workers the right to form trade unions. But the United Arab Emirates still does not allow them. Kuwait's social affairs and labour minister, Faisal al-Hajji, said on Monday he had recommended to the cabinet the introduction of a minimum wage for foreign workers on government contracts.

**Pakistani, Indian, Bangladeshi, Egyptian, Filipino and Nepalese construction workers fight in Qatar**

29th of August 2005: Six hundred immigrant construction workers in this tiny, oil-rich Gulf state have won a week-long strike against poor living conditions and the non-payment of wages. The management told the workers, mainly from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Egypt and Nepal, to end their strike or face deportation. But the workers refused to call off the strike until all their demands were accepted. A week's strike forced the employers to accept the demands. According to the AFP news agency: "600 workers, mostly Indian, went on strike against the poor living conditions and the non-payment of salaries for six months. This is a new development in a country like Qatar, which is completely dependent on foreign workers". Four other private Qatari companies are also involved in the dispute. This is the second action of this kind in Qatar in the last four months of 2005 and the first official labour dispute since the state amended its labour law last year.

**Chinese workers' row in Qatar**

9th of August 2005: Doha: Timely mediation by Qatari authorities has brought to an end a dispute between 237 striking Chinese construction workers and their Chinese employers, who had seconded them to a contracting company here early this year. The workers were on a flash stir for sometime protesting against non-payment of salaries and the way their wages were calculated. The workers arrived here in March this year, seconded to a local construction firm by the Chinese firm. A dispute with their employers arose recently and they struck work in protest. The workers chose four of their colleagues to represent them at the talks. Involved in the talks, apart from officials of the Chinese company and workers' representa-

tives, were the departments of public prosecution and labour. It was decided that their employers would return 70 per cent of the money they had charged from them and put the sum in their bank accounts back home as also clear their immediate dues.

**Indian workers repatriated from Qatar**

25th of October 2005: Less than 36 hours after a group of Indian workers lodged a complaint with their country's embassy on Sunday against their employers, demanding to return home, they were repatriated by the company yesterday evening after being paid all dues. "This is the quickest ever repatriation of aggrieved workers as far as I know," said an Indian embassy official.

**Thousands of migrant workers block main road in Dubai**

19th of September 2005: AFP and Reuters news agencies described a demonstration of immigrant workers in Dubai, the capital of the United Arab Emirates (UAE): "It is an incredible and unbelievable scene for a city like Dubai, the fastest emerging business capital in the Gulf. Some 1,000 workers virtually took over Shaikh Zayed road at the Nakheel Interchange and started walking towards Dubai right across the five lanes and the shoulder, chanting slogans against terrible living conditions and non-payment of salaries. Some workers are even carrying red clothes to use as flags. Pakistani, Indian, Nepalese, Bangladeshi, Filipino and Egyptian construction workers are protesting jointly against ill treatment from the employers". The workers marched from the company's site of Palm Island Project to the highway. As a result, tailbacks over a kilometre in length occurred causing traffic delays and chaos. The 19 September protest was the biggest workers' demonstration, so far, in Dubai. The workers gathered from two different construction sites on the outskirts of the city. After holding a demonstration in front of the company offices they marched towards the city centre. They walked about four kilometres towards a main street in Dubai. The workers remained in the main street for three hours. They dispersed peacefully after successful negotiations with the Labour Ministry. The authorities assured the workers that their demands will be accepted and carried out in
one month. The immigrant construction workers also formed a committee to make contacts with other construction workers. The ministry’s staff negotiated with a number of workers’ representatives and representatives of the company and verified the workers claims of the company’s failure to pay the salaries of around 2,000 workers for the last four months. As a result of the protest the Indian government has blacklisted a UAE construction company after unpaid workers went on strike. Al Hamed, and the company’s owners, has already been banned from recruiting new labour for the next six months after workers blocked Sheikh Zayed Road on Monday.

**Unpaid construction workers survive on dates in the United Arab Emirates**

23rd of September 2005: Dozens of unpaid construction workers have been on a protest at their labour camp for the past 10 days, cut off from the outside world and surviving on dates from a nearby farm. The men are refusing to work unless they are paid five months’ wages. Fifteen other workers have already absconded, they said. The camp is outside Ajman (UAE), off a desert road, close to a date farm. Last Sunday, the 38 Indian, Nepalese and Pakistani men working for a labour supply company went to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs to lodge a complaint, but could not afford to pay charges to a typing office. He said they had trouble communicating with labour officials, because the men speak regional languages. Only a handful speak broken Hindi and English.

**Workers seek embassy’s help over salary arrears in the United Arab Emirates**

6th of September 2005: Around 100 workers of two construction firms in the Industrial Area of Rayyan gathered yesterday at the Indian embassy to seek its intervention over their mounting salary arrears. staying away from one of the company’s major sites in Rayyan since the last week of July. The company employs a sizeable number of Nepalese and some Bangladeshis, Sri Lankans, Sudanese and Pakistanis.

**Fijian contract workers strike in Kuwait**

23rd of May 2005: At least 200 Fijians signed up by Lolohea’s Meridian Services Agency (LMSA) to work in Kuwait began strike action on May 23 over a pay dispute. Sent to Kuwait four months ago to work mainly as truck drivers, they have not been employed and are receiving a "training wage" which is much lower than what they were promised and have had to find work elsewhere. LMSA has signed up over 15,000 Fijians who are mainly employed in the Middle East. They are charged between $US90 and $180 for each application. Many, however, have returned to their rural homes without receiving any work. Expatriate Fijian workers send over $180 million home each year.

**Wage rise of migrant oil workers in Azerbaijan instigate local work-force to strike**

3rd of December 2005: More than 1,000 local workers employed by McDermott, a leading US oil services company in Azerbaijan, renewed a strike on November 29 to protest low wages, discrimination and poor working conditions. The action ended late in the evening after McDermott management agreed to raise wages and meet demands for health insurance, but the long-term effects promise to linger on. The two-day strike is the first serious protest action by local employees of foreign companies operating in Azerbaijan, and has raised concerns about copycat actions throughout the country’s strategic energy industry. The action follows a one-day strike on November 22 that saw workers briefly take control of McDermott’s seaside facility 20 kilometres south of Baku. Later the same day, the strike was suspended. McDermott constructs pipelines and builds oil rigs for British Petroleum (BP), the head of a group of Western companies building a major oil export pipeline for Azerbaijan from the Caspian Sea. The company, which employs more than 2,500 people, is BP’s biggest contractor in Azerbaijan. The strike reportedly brought work at the company to a complete halt. In addition to roughly 1,600 local employees, McDermott employs more than 500 foreign labourers from India, the Philippines and elsewhere. A 17.5 percent increase in salaries for McDermott’s foreign employees at the beginning of November motivated local workers to ask for a 15-20 percent increase in their own pay, strikers said. One striker complained about
an uneven distribution of pay between similarly qualified foreign and Azerbaijani workers. "Without giving any reason, the salaries of local workers in McDermott have been reduced 50 percent since October 1, 2005, and now we get $250-$300 per month," said Shakhkamal Bagirov. "Foreign workers who have the same qualifications are getting several times more." Local workers also say they are treated as second-tier employees. Striking workers told that foreigners from India and the Philippines or other countries eat in separate rooms from Azerbaijani workers and are served better quality food. Foreign workers "enjoy all kinds of respect here," the strikers said. The local press states that foreign labourers would earn "about 2,000 US-dollars" per month, which seems rather ill-informed or propaganda. Under the terms of an agreement reached between workers and management on the afternoon of November 29, local employees will receive a 20 percent salary increase by December 1. Some non-governmental organization representatives have forecast that strikes could be duplicated on other Azerbaijani pipeline construction projects if workers' demands are met. One foreign oil company senior manager, who asked not to be named, told that the Azerbaijani government unofficially encourages foreign oil companies to hire foreign workers. "There is a reason for that. Most of the contracts will expire soon. For example, the contract of McDermott with BP expires in the first half of 2006 and all of McDermott's employees would lose their jobs. A foreign worker will just leave the country after that and will not create any problems for the government, unlike his Azeri colleagues. So, the fewer potential unemployed [people] in the country, the better for the government," the source said. Sabit Bagirov admits that such a problem exists. More than 12,000 local workers could lose their jobs over the next four years in the oil industry, he said, as construction of oil and gas pipelines and oil rigs comes to a close. "It will be [a] tough problem for the government," Bagirov told Day.az. "These people got used to get relatively high salaries and it will be difficult to them to find equal jobs. It will create some social tension in the country and the government must start [to] think about it now."

800 workers from the Philippines, India, Sri Lanka and Nepal strike at US military-camp in Iraq

26th of May 2005: Some 300 Filipinos employed at a US military camp in Iraq went on strike to protest poor working conditions, at least 500 workers from India, Sri Lanka and Nepal joined the strike. The workers, under contract with Prime Projects International (PPI) and Kellogg, Brown & Root (KBR), are based at Camp Cooke in the province of Taji. KBR is a subsidiary of Halliburton Companies, which was once headed by US Vice President Dick Cheney. Despite a travel ban to Iraq, the Philippines is the biggest supplier of manpower for US-led coalition forces, about 6,000 Filipinos are working in various camps. As a result of the strike's deadlock, the company said it is ready to prepare the return of the workers to the Philippines aboard two chartered flights via Dubai International Airport.

Soliman left his family in the Philippines for what sounded like a sure thing -- a job as a warehouse worker at Camp Anaconda in Iraq. His new employer, Prime Projects International (PPI) of Dubai, is a major, but low-profile, subcontractor to Halliburton's multi-billion-dollar deal with the Pentagon to provide support services to U.S. forces. But Soliman wouldn't be making anything near the salaries -- starting $80,000 a year and often topping $100,000 -- that Halliburton's engineering and construction unit, Kellogg, Brown & Root (KBR) pays to the truck drivers, construction workers, office workers, and other labourers it recruits from the United States. Instead, the 35-year-old father of two anticipated $615 a month -- including overtime. For a 40-hour work week, that would be just over $3 an hour. But for the 12-hour day, seven-day week that Soliman says was standard for him and many contractor employees in Iraq, he actually earned $1.56 an hour. The average annual income in Manila is $4,384. Tens of thousands of such (Third Country Nationals) TCN labourers have helped set new records for the largest civilian workforce ever hired in support of a U.S. war. While the exact number of TCNs working in Iraq is uncertain, a rough estimate can be gleaned from Halliburton's own numbers, which indicate that TCNs make up 35,000 of KBR's 48,000 workers in Iraq employed under
sweeping contract for military support. Adding to the dangers and hardships of a war zone, some TCNs complain publicly about not being paid the wages they expected. Others say their employers use “bait-and-switch” tactics: recruiting them for jobs in Kuwait or other Middle Eastern countries and then pressuring them to go to Iraq. All of these problems have resulted in labour disputes, strikes and on-the-job protests.

**After the protest: US-subcontractor KBR in Iraq replaces Asian workers by Africans**

1st of December 2005: The U.S. military has paid Halliburton subsidiary KBR about $12 billion so far for so-called logistics support to U.S. military personnel in Iraq, the largest contract of its kind ever. KBR in turn hires that work out entirely to subcontractors whose job it is to recruit, transport, house, feed and pay "third-country" nationals to stock, prepare, serve and clean up at the dining facilities at 43 bases across Iraq.

That is what brought around 770 workers from Sierra Leone, Africa, to Iraq in July to work for ESS Support Services Worldwide, A British-based food service company specializing in "remote site, defense and off-shore locations." For this they are paid $150 a month, roughly 45 cents an hour. Their housing -- three to a standard size trailer -- laundry, food and uniforms are provided free. Previous to the Sierra Leone contract, ESS employed workers from Sri Lanka who were paid about $400 a month for the same work. Kelly said the monthly wage offered to the Sierra Leoneans is far higher than what they would earn at home. According to the Sierra Leone worker, some 7,000 candidates showed up to apply for the 750 jobs ESS offered in June 2005. Sierra Leone is an extremely poor country, with a market-based economy and a per capita income of less than $100 per year. For the last decade a violent insurgency has destroyed the local economy. The government approved a minimum wage of about $4 a week for a 40-hour work week, according to the State Department’s 2004 human rights report. "The catalyst for having to go to Sierra Leone to recruit in the first was that the respective governments of India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Thailand and the Philippines have all put an official ban on their nationals working or traveling in Iraq.

**Chinese Workers in Israel strike for unpaid wages**

5th of July 2005: Around 200 Chinese workers sat down in protest outside the offices of Malibu-Israel, the construction company that had employed them, on July 5, reported Kav La’Oved’s August 2005 e-news. They insisted that they would not move until a company representative came to negotiate with them on their demand for payment of wages due for the month of May. Israel’s law on the employment of migrant workers such as these Chinese has changed recently. Instead of being hired directly by a construction company, they should now be employed by a manpower agency that will serve as a mediator. The company is meant to pay the workers’ wages to the agency, which then pays the workers. By placing greater distance between the workers and the companies that are directly using their labour, they make action to seek redress more complicated, as it is less obvious to whom workers should make representations. In this case, the Chinese workers saw Malibu-Israel as the right address for their protest. The errant company promised to pay the manpower agency, and the Chinese workers returned to their jobs. A Central Bureau of Statistics press release put the total number of migrant workers at the end of the year at 188,000, of whom 91,500 held valid work permits. During 2004, 34,000 had entered Israel legally, with permits, and 41,000 had been deported or left voluntarily. The percentage breakdown for the workers’ countries of origin was: Thailand (31 percent), The Philippines (19 percent), Romania (14 percent), China (9 percent), former Soviet Union (9 percent), Turkey (4 percent), India (3 percent) and Bulgaria (3 percent). This suggests that the trend toward increasing employment of workers from East and Southeast Asia continues. Their proportion among the foreign workers in Israel in 2001 was around 10 percent.

**Thai workers in Israel - The bonds of silence**

May 2005: Summary of detailed article from Israeli workers centre (http://www.kavlaoed.org): Over the past few months shocking and disturbing images of Thai workers sleeping in chicken coops, metal barrels, and underground tunnels
have appeared on TV almost once a week. In 2004 the Israeli government issued 26,000 work permits in agriculture. Only 24,800 were actually used by farmers. The majority of these workers are Thai. During the year 10,000 Thai workers entered Israel legally, and a similar number left or were deported.

Almost all Thai workers arrive in Israel with a valid, government issued visa and work permit. Work termination for any reason entails an immediate loss of legal status. It is very difficult for Thai workers to obtain assistance because most work in rural communities, do not speak English, and receive little to no help from the Thai Embassy. Thai workers are employed in peripheral agricultural communities far from major cities. There is also a language barrier because most Thai workers speak neither Hebrew nor English.

Prior to 2003, the NGO Kav LaOved was rarely approached by Thai workers and therefore little was known about the employment conditions and problems faced by the Thai migrant worker community in Israel. Although Kav LaOved knew that the Thai workers were not receiving all that was legally owed them - the typical rate is about 11-12 Shekels (around $2.5) per hour, and 13-15 shekels per overtime hour, as opposed to a minimum of almost 18 Shekels ($4) per hour, and a 25-50% increase for overtime -, Kav LaOved assumed that they were being paid regularly.

Unlike in the homecare and construction migrant worker employment sectors, there is minimal mobility within the migrant worker agricultural employment sector. This limited mobility combined with the random fashion in which migrant agricultural workers are terminated leaves the Thai workers without alternative employment opportunities. Rather than complain, Thai workers continue to work for their employers despite the extreme violation of their rights through: non-payment of wages, payment of wages below minimum wage, holding of passports (very common, even though illegal), underpaid overtime, and work with unprotected toxic materials.

Placement agencies prefer to bring new workers from Thailand, profiting from the commission which new workers are forced to pay. Recent changes in Israeli law allow foreign workers to stay in Israel for up to 5 years. This has resulted in increased mediation fees of up to $7,000. Most workers cannot afford to pay the mediation fee upfront, and are therefore forced to take loans and use their first year salary to pay the mediation fee, which accrues interest. Unfortunately, some employment agencies provide workers who have paid high fees, expecting to work for 5 year, with work for only one or two years. After one or two years, these workers wind up either "on the run" trying to find new unauthorized employment or deported against their will. The government has declared a "closed sky" policy in the agriculture sector. This policy sets a procedure: employers are allowed to bring new workers into the country only if, after one month of searching, they cannot satisfy their employment needs with available migrant workers currently in prison, awaiting deportation. It seems as though the immigration police prefers to deport detainees and fulfil their government-set deportation quotas over finding new jobs for migrants already in Israel.

**factory temp-work**

**Wired - Temp-Work in the Rail-Industry, Germany**

**The corporation Vossloh: From Prussian war profiteer to multinational investor of the rail-industry**

In its official presentation Vossloh prides itself with the long history of the family company: "In 1883 Eduard Vossloh offers the Royal Prussian Railway to produce suspension rings for the track fittings. Being a disabled war veteran he gets the order. The smithy was enlarged and additional iron products, such as curtain rails were produced."

Vossloh became a multinational company only in the 1990s, made possible mainly due to the opening of the former Eastern Bloc for foreign capital and the privatisation process of the railways in the East and the West. Vossloh acquired shares and took over various companies active in the production of rail infrastructure or vehicles. Today Vossloh employs about 4,500 people. The main production locations are in Germany,
France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain, Great Britain and Poland, as well as branches and joint-ventures in Asia and America. The number of workers in Germany amounts to 1,574, the total in all other countries to 2,966. The total staff is divided into three different company units: 3,050 workers produce rail infrastructure (track parts, switches etc.), 1,175 people work in the vehicle construction and 283 in the information technology department. In addition to that a lot of temp workers are hired, according to the orders situation (see below). The product spectrum ranges from switches and rail parts produced in Poland, to passenger information systems delivered for the German high-speed trains ICE or the Frankfurt Airport, electrical installations for trams and electro buses ordered by transport companies from various European and North-American cities, to construction of diesel train-engines in plants in Kiel, Germany and Valencia, Spain, which Vossloh took over from Siemens and Alsthom. In the engine-construction minor conflicts occurred when Vossloh took over and the management announced job cuts. The dismissals in Kiel were explained by high steel prices and low demand for diesel engines, all temps were sent home and 180 permanent had to go in March 2005.

With the take-over Vossloh also bought the old business relations, e.g. those of the French subsidiary which supplies the Israeli Railways with switch-parts for the last 20 years. It is interesting to see that Vossloh not only bought into the sector but re-combines the newly acquired units on an international level, e.g. for a huge order previous to the Olympic Games, Vossloh in Poland delivered track parts for the public transport in Athens and the plant in Düsseldorf produced the electrical equipment for the new trams.

As a supplier Vossloh depends on the main clients and on their flops: Vossloh delivers a company responsible for the maintenance of the EuroTunnel, which turned out to be rather unprofitable and supplied equipment for the trams Siemens built for Budapest, which became famous for their construction flaws.

All in all Vossloh is said to be on the economic upturn or at least stable, since the beginning of 2000 the Vossloh shares have had an annual revenue of 24 per cent, in 2004 the company achieved an annual turn-over of 922 million Euro, a returns rate (before taxes and interests) of 11.5 per cent. Capital employed 690.2 Million Euro, return on capital employed 15.3 per cent, an investment sum of 39.4 Million, personnel costs 218.9 Million.

One of the subsidiaries: Vossloh Kiepe Electrical Systems

Kiepe is a medium size company in Düsseldorf, Germany producing electrical equipment, mainly for the electrical propulsion of rail- and road vehicles. The electrical equipment makes up 40 per cent of the total costs of the train or tram production. At the main location in Düsseldorf, Kiepe employs about 450 people, of which 278 are white-collar workers, mainly technicians and engineers, 172 are blue-collar workers and 100 people work in the subsidiaries in Vienna, Milano, Ottawa, Krakow. Kiepe has a tradition similar to Vossloh, having started as a family company and being specialised in a technically quite demanding field with small product series. Unlike Vossloh Kiepe had rather difficult times in the 1990s, the company was bought by various investors and finally ended up as a part of the Vossloh cooperation in 2003.

Following examples of some of the orders which Kiepe managed to get hold of in the last three years:
- September 2005: electrical equipment for the subway in Philadelphia, USA, worth 11.2 million Euro
- August 2005: equipment for trolley-buses in Lecce, Italy, cooperation with SIRTI (telecommunication company in Italy) and Van Hool (bus manufacturer in Belgium)
- July 2005: conversion of 140 buses in Switzerland from diesel to electro engines
- March 2005: order to produce equipment for 30 new e-buses in Leipzig, Germany
- January 2005: Kiepe and Bombardier deliver 38 e-buses for the public transport in Vienna, Austria
- July 2004: Kiepe and Neoplan deliver 142 e-buses to Athens, Greece
- January 2003: Kiepe gets the order to produce equipment for 228 trolley-buses for Vancouver, Canada
The last example shows that between the award of the order and the actual delivery there are three years of development and production. Kiepe got the order in January 2003 and in December 2005 the company thanked its workers for the first 100 buses by feeding them free cheese rolls. For the Vancouver order Kiepe hired about 70 temp-workers from twelve different temp agencies. The first temps started in July 2005, the last went in December 2005. The following description of the daily working-life refers to this period.

**On the job: the work organization**

The plant is divided into three different units: the office bloc for administration and engineering, the mechanical and the electrical work-shop, which includes the quality department and the department for the assembling of the circuit boards. In the two latter departments there are mainly women employed. The final product is a 2 x 4 x 1.5 meter metal box with several thousand electrical connections and electronic parts inside. About 100 people work directly together, producing individual parts of this box and assembling them. They make about eight boxes a day. There are different production teams responsible for single parts, they rivet metal frames or wire relays. There is a so-called cable corner where hundreds of kilometres of cable are cut and prepared for connecting each day. It is quite astonishing how few work steps have been outsourced, how much is still done within the company. This is due to the small series, the frequent changes and adjustments in the run of an order, maybe also due to the low wage level. It is nevertheless surprising that they choose to assemble and connect a fan for the box they tell you how much time you are allowed for getting your parts, for assembling them, for preparing your cables, for wiring the whole thing. There is a lot of time pressure, which is eased by missing parts or problems with the total coordination, so that it is difficult for the management to pin down single workers. During the Vancouver order about 70 temps were gathered and the management told us off for being too unproductive and for making too many mistakes. There was an interesting situation in the cable corner, which is quite hidden behind huge scaffoldings with cable drums. About six people work in this corner, often sitting together at a big table, preparing and cutting wires with mechanical tools, there is a low-tech machine which is able to cut cable of smaller diameters. Most of the management’s complains about low productivity addressed the cable corner, most of the interesting conversations could be had there, as well, being it about French riots, latest jobs or love stories. At the end of December they brought in a new machine which was able to cut cables of all diameters. By that time about three quarters of all temps had already been sent home and the remaining did not know how much longer their stay would be. The introduction of this new machine instigated some debates. First of all everyone was happy that the machine would do the cutting of 120 mm cable, which avoids painful tendonitis or RTS.\(^1\)

The next tangible difference is speed: the cutting by machine is about four times faster than by hand. We made some calculations on how long it would take to valorise the investment sum of 30,000 Euro. A negative effect is obvious: one of us now had to stand next to the machine all the time and was not able to take part in the table conversations anymore. The machine was so noisy that chatting became difficult anyway. Finally, and noticeable for everyone was the immediate effect of the increased productivity on our employment at Vossloh: the machine would have reduced the stay of some of us by one week, which meant one week earlier on the dole or cable dragging on the

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1 Repetitive Trauma Syndrome
rail tracks between Duisburg and Amsterdam in winter.

**On the job: the workers**

The work-force is international, only about the half of the workers were born in Germany. There are many Polish workers employed, most of them already for a long time and with permanent contracts. Most of these Polish workers are aged 45 and older, most of them arrived in Germany the early 1990s. Many of them worked in the Polish heavy industries and ship yards, some of them can tell stories from 1980/81, about the Lenin Shipyard in Danzig and its rock-bands, about Solidarnosc-banners being attached to chimneys after the concerts. Other people come from China, Vietnam, the Dominican Republic, Argentina, Turkey, Greece, Yugoslavia, Italy, Romania, Russia, Ukraine. Milan, for example, came from Novi Sad, Yugoslavia to Vossloh in 1973, as an official Gastarbeiter, so-called guest worker. He worked as an engineer, had some difficulties, got bullied and depressed and now drags his handcart with machine parts through the halls. Everyone calls the Chinese woman in the quality control Shaolin, because she is quite strict. When the 1989 revolution took place Daniel from Romania lived in a small village near Arad. Also a lot of German workers have international and migration experiences, mainly the temp workers. Karl worked in China for four years, assembling and installing textile-and photo film machines in Shanghai. Thorsten was sent to shipyards in Singapore and the Netherlands, Christian to Tokyo, repairing machines for Hitachi, Lars for Siemens in France and Belgium. There is a wealth of different experiences, ranging from 33 years working for ABB in Essen, Germany, to working self-employed for the Ford automobile plant in Cologne, repairing complex machines, to mining and working in power plants or the chemical industry. Some worked on airport construction sites, some were in the army on interventions abroad, others did courses as care workers for elderly people. People have experienced globalisation. For example they were employed by a German company to go to china and work setting up the new assembly lines there. When the whole company moved all their production to Shanghai they were laid off again. They opened their own small business, offering their skills to big clients, had to declare themselves bankrupt when the crisis in the car industry kicked in. They have been the praised as the backbone of German industry, the skilled workers of the core sectors. Now they are on 9 Euro-jobs and do not know if and where they will be employed the next month. They have to take week-end jobs, cash-in-hand building sites or cleaning industrial machines. They have a lot of life experience, some have been in jail, in mental hospitals, are or were drug addicts, violent football fans. They have daughters who were born as sons and they talk openly about it. What they are lacking are experiences of collective struggle. They belong to a generation in Germany which worked in the main industries for thirty years and longer without having been on strike for a single day. At Kiepe there have been two days of short warning strikes in seventeen years.

**The problems of the permanents**

One of the main problems of the permanent staff is the variation of the weekly working-time according to the orders situation. For the duration of the Vancouver order the management enforced a 45-hours week for everyone plus Saturday-shifts for some of the workers. The overtime is converted into paid leave for when there is less to do. Most of the workers had 200 hours overtime on their time-account. Another reason for discontent is the new wage model ERA which is supposed to be introduced in the whole German metal sector by 2007, as a result of collective bargaining. The new wage model requires an individual assessment of each job and its tasks. A lot of people at Kiepe, particularly the women in the circuit board department, fear wage losses. The permanents get about 5 Euro more per hour than the temps, about 14 Euro before taxes. Some of the permanents treat the temps like temporary hands, like a low-wage threat and are annoyed by the additional stress of having to explain the same things to new people again and again. Although it needed asking to find out who was a temp and who permanent, given the equality in numbers and the ever changing job tasks. All in all the atmosphere at Kiepe is said to have worsened over the last years,
more stress and time pressure, more emphasis on the dependence on single clients.

The Problems of the Temps

If you compare the job at Kiepe/Vossloh with work on construction sites or other temp jobs you can say that at least you do not get too dirty and that physically the job is not too tiring. Some of the temps have their third or fourth stay at Kiepe, each year for a four or five month period. That is why no-one hopes for a permanent contract, even the management is honest about it and offers nothing. The fact that the temps count for half of the total staff in production does not lead to collective discussions as to whether there is enough power to demand more money or permanent contracts. Perhaps that is also due to the temps coming from twelve different temp agencies, although most of us had no contact to the agencies apart from sending our weekly hour-sheets. Most of the temps travel a long way to work, often more than 40 kilometres, some 70. The compensation they get from the agencies does not cover the costs. The temps get more or less the same wage, between 9 and 10 Euro/hour before taxes. This slight difference is already an incentive: some temps changed the agency while working at Kiepe during the Vancouver order and managed to get a minimum wage rise. Most of the temps have worked as permanents, mainly for big companies but they do not see the chance to get back to that status. Everyone is annoyed, by low wages, uncertainty, Hartz IV-dole-reform and politics in general. Everyone can tell stories about being fucked over by the agencies, e.g. some have been asked by their agency whether they need a hotel room for a job in Rotterdam or whether a tent would do. Given that most of the agencies pay only 35 Euro per day for hotel and food, a tent does not seem too unreasonable. Some people wanted to form a works council in order to deal with these problems collectively, but finally the active people quit the job. After the wigging we got from the Kiepe management concerning our work performance the atmosphere was really bad. People complained about schizophrenia: on one hand Kiepe demands the same work performance and experience from the temps as from the permanents, on the other hand everyone knows that as soon as the work is done you are fired. Although people knew this fact there was a lot of bad blood when the sacking actually happened. On a Friday in late December 100 trolley buses were completed and the company gave everyone free cheese and ham rolls as a kind of reward. We made jokes about final binge and that we will probably all be on the dole within the next week. Actually a dozen of the temps got their sack already two hours later, at least half of them were also sacked by their agencies on the very same day.

Missed chances?

It is rather difficult for people to organize actions within short notice, but particularly for the temps that is their only chance. The idea of a go-slow strike came up too late, a great part of the order was already completed, but the connections amongst the temps still too weak for more offensive measures. All in all we have to state the enormous contrast of vast proletarian experiences within the total work-force, a rapid worsening of working conditions and the blatant lack of experiences with collective actions.
In the last newsletter we published an article on the plan to close down the Bosch-Siemens household appliances factory in Berlin/Germany (see ppnews #4; http://www.prol-position.net/nl/2005/04/washing). This is an update from Wildcat #75, Winter 2005/06: A conversation with a worker from that factory.

"Now They Call Us Heroes Everywhere!"

Last time we talked, I said: "If the negotiations end without result, it would be the best thing that could possibly happen to you: then you’ll have the same conditions for the next year and a half and you won’t have to work your ass off... you can call in sick now and then.”

That’s what we do now! (laughs)

At that time, Bosch-Siemens wanted to close the factory and your assessment was that they wouldn’t negotiate over it. Now, everything’s turned out different...

We formed a bargaining committee and drew up a list of demands: three month’s severance pay, two years work in a rescue company,¹ full pay for any worker over 50 years old until they retire, and 700 Euros payment per child... In all, our demands added up to 140 million Euros (140 Millionen). The works council started negotiating with this list. At the end they couldn’t reach an agreement. Saturday morning the negotiations failed. They decided to meet on Monday for the last time, at that point the works council said: Monday morning we’re announcing our bargaining demands, Wednesday we’re going to hold an assembly with the strike ballot, and Thursday we will go on strike. Monday morning the site manager announced that the factory would stay open. This was a shock for the workers! (laughs) "Really!? " "Here it is on paper." Since then it’s been pretty normal, but no one knows for how long. It’s just like nothing happened. Management had said: "We’re not going to leave the plant like it is, we need to have the books in the black!” But they didn’t do anything.

Why were they so afraid of a strike?

I think they had prepared for the strike and had stocked up on Premium washing machines – we can’t control how many of them sell. But we knew that they had a higher production of units for the factory in Nauen (the factory delivers units to Nauen, Germany and Lodz, Poland). I don’t think that we could have hurt them with a two or three week strike! Instead, I think there was political pressure: for one, it was during the election campaign and two, many companies are having the same conflict and we could have become an example for other workers... It’s not like the bosses of Bosch-Siemens decide on their own! For example the bosses of Bosch and Siemens got involved. Finally, our demands were pretty expensive compared to the costs other factories are closed with: 140 million Euros for 700 people. They were willing to pay two months wages, but wanted to put only one month down on the social plan and declare the second month a bonus. They’re afraid this would set an example for other plants! Because in the next two or three years other sites are threatened: now the production runs in Poland (dryers and dish washers), and in Turkey they want to set-up a line for another dish washer, so soon Dillingen will be closed. Then they are opening the refrigerator factory in Russia and so Gienigen is threatened...

The situation, as you explain it in many ways addresses the company’s concerns, which is to cut jobs: Telekom, Allianz, Daimler Chrysler and so on: they have a lot of money, but they’ve been in the red for years with what they call their “operative business.” A struggle like yours could set an example others would follow: "let them cut jobs, we want big compensation payments that will last until we retire.”

We were strong-willed, everything was ripe. Almost everybody participated in the actions. I think this was crucial. In addition, we had an action at the front gate and for the first time in the history

¹ Under German labor law, when a company imposes involuntary lay-offs, it has to provide a social plan for the worker, which may include the company paying another firm, what’s known as a "rescue company", to provide employment for a year or so.
of Siemensstadt (the section of Berlin where this factory is located), workers at other Siemens plants came over to the gate. Also, for the first time, we went together to the headquarters in Munich and workers from all other Siemens plants came too. We could have been an example! For Bosch-Siemens it’s cheaper to let the factory run for another two, three years and run-up a 10 million deficit. But they save on the benefits: everybody who leaves now doesn’t get a job at a rescue company and so on, so the company saves money... The most active workers are leaving now.

And if they decide in the summer to close at the end of 2006, they might be hoping that you won’t be able to mobilize massively like you did this time...

There is also a difference in the media coverage! It makes a difference if they close a factory or just lay off 300 people.

What’s it like now in the factory?

During the struggle the quality of the washing machines we made was very high, it hasn’t been that high in a long time! The number of staff out sick was never that low; maybe it was because everybody was curious. And there wasn’t any sabotage or anything like that. After it was clear the plant wasn’t shutting, the number of blue-collar workers calling in sick rose to 17-18 percent and that’s where it remains. Temp workers had to be hired again. And they can’t motivate people anymore. The workers say: fuck it, sooner or later they’re going to close down anyway. Many thought they’d get the three month severance, that would have been more money than they’d see in their whole life. Few workers were happy that the plant isn’t closing! Management has now started acting against the sick workers, with meetings at human resources, where workers calling out sick get threatened with lay-offs. They’re using the doctors at the health-insurance plan to monitor if a worker is truly sick... But people are fed up with this work, almost everybody has worked here for 18-20 years, they’re really fed up with the assembly line! They’re pissed-off.

That’s a strange standoff: the company can’t hire new workers either!

Yes, and if they don’t find enough volunteers who want to quit and who can be fired according to the social plan, then we’ll be a plant where everybody on the line will be over 50 years old. Now, the average age in production is already 47. Recently we found out that everybody younger than 40 has some sort of protection: as back up members of the works council or something else (Laughs). In addition there are Siemens work rules which state that after 25 years of seniority workers can’t be fired by operational lay-offs unless they’re given a job at a rescue company, retraining, and other benefits. That’s roughly 300 people, these people have to be shifted to different departments if they close the plant. During negotiations, the works council said they wouldn’t negotiate over those 300! I guess this was another point, which weakened them: this problem exists in many Siemens-factories and they don’t want that shouted from the rooftops.

And now we’re called heroes everywhere! Samsung workers invited us; they want us to explain how to obtain jobs. Yes, really! (Laughs) "The struggle was worthwhile"... I wouldn’t say that, but it wasn’t bad! Politically you can say: we fought and turned back a company’s decision, okay! This gave people courage which was needed in fighting against the closure. Now negotiations with the works council are starting. Mid October, Gutberlet (boss of Bosch/Siemens) gave an interview in a daily newspaper under the headline "Hope for plant in Berlin" in which he claimed to be negotiating over working hours, year end benefits (Christmas benefits) and midterm benefits (vacations benefits)... The works council wants job protection for five years, so they are willing to talk about "everything." But in my opinion, extending people’s working hours isn’t possible. And wage cuts, hell no! People understand that the less money they earn now, the less compensation and unemployment money they will get later. The works council’s hands are tied. I guess, the IG Metal (union) would sign anything to keep the plant in Berlin. But they wouldn’t convince the workers.

November 2005
ris in france

We document the Letter no.19, written by Mouvement Communiste in December 2005. They analyze the development and the reasons behind the riots in France in November 2005 and develop their position and critique from their communist perspective.

The Recent Violence in the French Suburbs is Difficult to Integrate into the General Class Combat

Summary of events

The events which followed the accidental death of two young people in Clichy-sous-Bois must not be underestimated. They have imposed themselves on both the dominant classes and on the proletariat as one of the principle subjects of discussion right now within each of their respective camps. That is why we must formalise some of our reflections on these facts, all the more so today when the unrest is extinguished and the government seems satisfied. But first let’s recall a few facts.

27 October: a banal incident between a group of youths and the police in Clichy-sous-Bois, in Seine-Saint-Denis, is transformed into a drama. Three lads retreated into an EDF compound. Two died from electric shock, the third was seriously injured. There followed a battle of interpretations. The police denied having caused the three accidents. Some youths close to the victims said that the deaths had been the product of a climate of fear instituted by the forces of repression in poor neighbourhoods. Rapidly, confrontations broke out between the assembled forces of repression and dozens, and then hundreds of young people. The night was hot, arrests multiplied, more police and CRS cooled down the anger of the youth of Clichy-sous-Bois. The area in the lower part of the town of Chêne-Pointu (10,000 habitants) was at the heart of the first wave of confrontations which lasted until 30 October. The families of the electrocuted youths appealed for calm. A silent march was held on the morning of Saturday 29 October. Religious and community representatives and the mayor himself each in their turn called for "dignity" and calm. Several hundred residents participated. Clashes quickly spread to the adjoining town of Montfermeil, with its Bosquets estate. The 400 cops arrested 22 youths. Starting on Sunday, 10 were brought in front of the Bobigny prosecutor to be examined. Eight of them were immediately brought to be sentenced on Monday 31st. Three were condemned to two months in prison.

On Sunday 30th, at 9 p.m., tear gas penetrated the mosque of Clichy-sous-Bois during new skirmishes. It was the end of Ramadan. The night of the 31st was even more agitated.

Clashes with the police happened in Aulnay-sous-Bois, Bondy, Tremblay-en-France and Neuilly-sur-Marne. In total some 68 vehicles were burnt in Seine-Saint-Denis in the course of that night. Trouble was also reported in Chelles (Seine-et-Marne), a town bordering Montfermeil, where 2

1 Translator’s Note – the translation of "banlieue" as "suburbs" is slightly problematic. The word "suburbs" in the English-speaking world tends to have a very respectable connotation – the suburbs are where the middle classes and the skilled workers live and the extreme concentrations of poverty are seen as being in the “inner cities”. In France, social engineering through town-planning has gone a lot further than in most other industrialised countries and a large percentage of the working class in big cities live in super-sized suburban estates, rather like the “housing schemes” of Glasgow and Edinburgh. But “suburbs” will have to do…

2 Clichy-sous-Bois comprises 28,000 inhabitants. Around 30% of housing is social housing (HLM - habitation à loyer modéré). The town suffers a rate of unemployment of 25%, 50% for the population under 25. The middle classes and professionals represent only 4.7% of the inhabitants. A third of families are foreigners, originating from every continent, settled for a long time or recently arrived, political refugees or without papers. The municipality of Clichy-sous-Bois has a potential tax revenue which is only 40% of average towns of equivalent size. “The town benefits from one of the most important programmes in France, endowed with 330 million euros, for the destruction of 1600 collective housing units and 1900 reconstructions, in addition to the 4000 dwellings on the plateau of Hauts-de-Clichy and the Bosquets estate, where 17,000 people live. The mayor regrets that the neighbourhood of 10,000 inhabitants of Chêne-Pointu, in lower Clichy, where the first incidents took place on Thursday, was not accepted for the programme. Since 2002, the local police has been reduced from 35 officers to 15 on the plateau land, from 15 to 8 in lower Clichy” (Le Monde, 5 November 2005)

3 The facts set out here are based on a hybrid of information received from the press and accounts collected by our own efforts.

4 An old warehouse converted to a place of worship.
seven cars were burned, according to the police, who had had stones thrown at them. Thirteen people, of the nineteen seized in Clichy-sous-Bois and Sevran-Beaudottes in the course of the night, were held for questioning on Tuesday for "destruction of property", "possession of incendiary substances" or "wilful violence", according to the police. The towns of Argenteuil and Sarcelles in the Val d’Oise also experienced incidents. For the city of Bobigny, the evening of Monday 31st did not see "riots" but "harassing actions" carried out by small groups of ten to fifteen attackers who threw stones at the forces of order in Sevran and Aulnay-sous-Bois, threw a molotov cocktail in the direction of the CRS in Clichy, and burned the garage of the municipal police of Montfermeil. In the mean time, Nicolas Sarkozy, Minister of the Interior, increased his military-style declarations, promising to "rid" France of "yobos and scum" by cleaning the suburbs "with a pressure hose". The provocation was an instant success.

On Tuesday 1 November, the Prime Minister, Dominique de Villepin, got involved in the matter by receiving the families of the two dead adolescents, with Sarkozy. The next day it was the turn of the President of the Republic, Jacques Chirac, to add his tuppence worth: "it is necessary to put people’s minds at rest. It is necessary that the law be applied firmly and in a spirit of dialogue and respect". And even: "we must act while always basing ourselves on the principles which make up our Republic: everyone must respect the law; everyone must have a chance". He finished by delivering a more articulate message than that of "his" Minister of the Interior: "We must go into immediate combined action even quicker on the terrain and development of dialogue." In conclusion, repression and integration, the two prongs of the Chiracian approach.

Following this the movement accelerated, and on 2 November affected the whole Paris region and then extended itself to the provinces from 3 November. The paroxysm was achieved on the night of 6 November. After that incidents grew slowly up until 8 November to be extinguished in the Paris region on 15 November and in the provinces on 18 November.

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5 You can find a detailed account of the events on the site http://www.mouvement-communiste.com.

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**A first inventory of the facts**

On Monday 7 November a retired man of 61 died from his injuries after being attacked by a youth at the bottom of his building in Stains. However, according to his wife, his death was not strongly linked to the riots. Dozens of people, residents, police officers and firemen, were injured. Among the most seriously affected were a fireman whose face was burnt by Molotov cocktail and a disabled woman who was seriously burnt following an arson attack on a bus by some youths in Sevran on 2 November. A young man lost his hand while trying to throw a tear gas grenade back at the forces of order in Toulouse on 7 November. A policeman received second degree burns to his face following the explosion of a molotov cocktail in a burning car. One cop was injured on the head and the shoulder by a pétanque ball. Five foreign journalists from Korea, Russia and Italy were attacked and slightly wounded.

Twenty five départements (out of 96) were affected by the violence. Curfews were imposed in seven départements by the police chiefs, aiming at around forty municipalities in total. No decree of this type was made in the Paris region but the mayors of Raincy and Savigny-sur-Orge set up a curfew by municipal order, the same as in Belfort. Some curfews concerned unaccompanied minors, notably those set up by order of the chief of police in Amiens, Orléans, Lyon, Nice, Rouen, Le Havre and Mont-de-Marsan. In Évreux, all he inhabitants of the La Madeleine district were affected, whether adults or minors. Gatherings where there was a risk of disturbing public order were forbidden on Saturday 12 November in Paris and the next day in Lyon, because of the state of emergency.

Some 300 municipalities were affected by the violence, including numerous suburbs of Paris, principally in Seine-Saint-Denis. In the provinces the towns most involved were Évreux, Saint-Étienne, Toulouse, Lille and the Lyon conglomeration. Also affected in the south, but to a lesser extent, were: Nice, Marseille, Nîmes, Carpentras, Montpellier, Perpignan, Mont-de-Marsan, Pau, Bordeaux. In the centre were Clermont-Ferrand and Tours, and in the east: Strasbourg, Metz and Nancy.

Around 9,500 cars were burned across the whole of France, reaching a peak of 1,400 vehicles on the...
night of 6 and 7 November. Dozens of buses were also burned (the RATP listed 140, of which 10 buses and RER were attacked by burning projectiles).

Dozens of public buildings, crèches, schools (particularly nursery schools), gymnasiuems, multimedia libraries, ordinary libraries, but also warehouses and businesses have been burned but the "damage" has also hit the following educational establishments: colleges (92 hit out of a total of 5,200), secondary schools (49 out of 2,500) and primary schools (106 out of 51,000). In around 20% of cases the damage has disturbed the functioning of classes. The post office (La Poste) has counted a hundred or so vehicles burned and 51 offices affected, of which 6 have had to temporarily close.

According to the Fédération française des sociétés d’assurances (FFSA), the destruction must have cost around 200 million euros to the insurance companies, 20 million of that just for the cars. By comparison, the floods of December 2003 cost them 700 million euros, the most insurance companies have ever paid out in France.

According to the latest list drawn up by the Ministry of Justice on 30 November, there have been 4,770 arrests, almost half after the incidents were over, leading to 4,402 held in police custody. 763 people have been sent to prison, more than a hundred of them minors, the youngest being aged 10. 135 judicial inquiries have been opened, 562 adults locked up (of which 422 were sentenced at an immediate appearance before a judge to prison terms, 45 to community service orders or suspended sentences, 59 discharged and 36 still waiting) and 577 minors have been presented to juvenile court judges (of which 118 are placed under a committal order)\(^6\).

It is worth saying that 9 out of 10 of those arrested were owners of a French ID card and that more than a third were not the children of immigrants and that a good proportion of them had a job.

A cop who beat a youth to the ground in the Nord de Paris suburb was locked up on Friday 9 November and then freed on the 15th. The heaviest sentence was handed down in the case of a young man of 20, sentenced to four years in prison in Arras (North) for the deliberate burning of two shops.

Around 12,000 police and gendarmes, supported by surveillance helicopters, were deployed across France. Some 3,000 police were mobilised in Paris for the weekend of 11 November. According to police sources, 26 police and gendarmes were injured in all.

**Undeniable facts**

Right from the start it must be understood that this movement remained excessively minoritarian. On Sunday 6 November, the high point of the events, there were at most 10,000 people more or less directly involved in the incidents. All the accounts agree (with the exception of Clichy-sous-bois, cradle of the confrontations) in saying that the people implicated acted in groups of 10 to 50, sometimes less. The extension of the clashes, surpassing 300 places across the country, is inversely proportional to their rootedness, as is demonstrated by the waning, certainly uneven and gradual, of the conflict in its initial locations. This is why it is not wrong to estimate the participants as, at most, scarcely 15,000 people in the whole of France throughout the duration of the events. Looking at the number arrested, more than 3,000 (which showed, as usual, a participation of all the categories of the neighbourhoods concerned, apart from women, which indicates an important limit), it is obvious that the military advantage remained with the forces of repression. The protesters rapidly avoided direct confrontations with the latter, opting instead for the multiplication of isolated acts, led by small groups, against private and state.

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6 In the course of the procedure the children’s’ judge can order a “provisional work placement”, “legal restrictions”, a "provisional detention" or a “monitored freedom”. During the judgement, instead of a punishment, the minor can be made the object of an educative measure (an admonishment, a presentation to the parents, a work placement or some kind of reparation).

7 But certain towns are conspicuous by their absence (Mantes-la-jolie, Chanteloup-les-vignes, Nanterre, Bagneux, for example) or only experienced minimal confrontations (Marseille for example). Why did these towns have no or very few incidents? Recalling the weight of the Islamists, the local "businessmen", the older brothers or politics led by the municipalities doesn’t explain everything. If the large scale black economy doesn’t like riots because they lead to more police, the same doesn’t go for the small scale business at the bottom of the chain. So, it is very likely that the little dealers participated in the riots.
property. At the same time, the forces of repression reduced the occasions of direct contact to a strict minimum and in the end came close to avoiding battles, events which might have given a different turn to events. On the contrary, the forces of repression concentrated on increasing preventive and selective raids.

In the absence of any message or demand coming explicitly from the rioters, we have to stick to the facts to try and gain an appreciation of the situation.

Thousands of vehicles have been set on fire in the same neighbourhoods that the rioters come from; schools have been attacked; class rooms destroyed; firemen, public transport workers and isolated proletarians have been robbed and, sometimes, savagely attacked. One aspect of these events has been to concentrate into a small period of time the things which normally happen in the same places all year round.

These deplorable acts are not happening on the margins of a movement that has various objectives and forms of struggle compatible with the independent struggle of the proletariat. Unfortunately, they represent the most important aspect of the acts set out here. That is why we consider that these acts are lacking in any kind of basic class politics.

The expression of hatred against the condition you are subjected to is in no way tolerable when it expresses itself by targeting other proletarians, other sectors of the exploited and oppressed class.

The war between poor people is the worst manifestation of the domination of capital. It is something which removes any hope for a radical transformation of the present situation.

Class hatred in various forms (defensive and political) is, on the contrary, the best manifestation of the will of the proletariat to exist by and for itself, in a process of struggle for its political unification against capital and the state. Nothing of this appears in the burnt out wrecks of cars and buses and the intimidation and violence against other workers. The appearance in the neighbourhoods hit by the riots of large sectors of the working class population who appeal to the state to restore order does not augur well. This behaviour con-

firms in its turn the present inability to overcome the deep divisions and the "every man for himself" mentality which rules in the estates as elsewhere.

The reaction of the state and the political forces which support it in the government

Now we’ll look at the management of the crisis by the state and the political forces which support it. The single slogan is the strengthening and rigorous application of the Law. Its culmination was the reactivation of the law of 1955 establishing a selective curfew – a measure which was prolonged on 15 November for three months. Even if its use (at the discretion of police chiefs) is far from being generalised, it allows repressive measures to be refined and used later. It habituates the population to an ever greater police presence and pushes back democratic protections. According to a survey appearing on Wednesday 9 November in the Parisien/Aujourd’hui en France, 73% of people interviewed about three of the principal measures of the Villepin plan, said they supported authorising the use of curfews. There were 24% opposed and 3% didn’t say. In response to the question "What is your attitude to what is happening in the suburbs at the moment?", 58% said they were "scandalised" – the rate amongst the inhabitants of the suburbs was 60%. 28% said they were "upset" (25% for the inhabitants of the suburbs), 12% were "understanding" (14% in the suburbs), and 1% were "in sympathy".

The ministers of the Villepin government stuck to the defence of republican order with a glorious unity. "The government is unanimous in its firmness", thundered Nicolas Sarkozy on Saturday 5 November, coming out of a crisis meeting in Matignon. The calls for national unity then increased. From Thursday 3 November, the president of the UDF, François Bayrou, felt that the situation in the suburbs merited a "national common front". The same day, Eric Raoult, UMP deputy mayor of Raincy, participated in a silent march of more than 500 people through the estate of Mitry d’Aulnay-sous-Bois, in the company of Socialists Harlem Désir (an old militant of the LCR and founder of SOS Racisme) and Jacques Séguela as well as the Stalinist Jean-Pierre Brard, deputy mayor of Montreuil (allied to the PCF). “Our march is not political. What’s more, all those elected have been in-

8 In France, 35,000 cars are burned per year and buses are regularly stoned.
vited, the right as well as the left”, said the UMP MP known for his old associations with the far right, for whom “a fire extinguisher does not have a political colour”. The Right also used these incidents as a pretext for justifying its “urban renovation plan”. “That makes 25 years that we have waited, the social cohesion plan” and its 15 billion makes twenty years we waited”, cried Jean-Louis Borloo, Employment Minister. “We launched a plan 18 months ago: close to 25 billion euros to transform the estates, double social housing, urban free zones. All that takes time and it is time that we are trying to speed up, that we are trying to reduce in the framework of a united government”, the minister insisted¹⁰.

These intentions were translated into a package of measures, announced with great pomp on 8 November. Here they are:

**Employment:**

All the youth of less than 25, looking for work or not, living in one of the 750 "sensitive areas”, will be called in for an “in-depth interview” in the next three months by the ANPE, in the local offices or in the Job Centres. A "specific solution" will be proposed to them in the following three months (education, training or a contract).

Those receiving benefits for those on the lowest incomes ("minima sociaux") will be encouraged to find a job by the creation of a bonus of 1,000 euros and an all-inclusive monthly bonus of 150 euros for 12 months.

20,000 support contracts for jobs and future contracts reserved for disadvantaged neighbourhoods will be created to develop jobs in the localities.

Fifteen new free zones will be added to the 85 existing ones.

The number of “adult intermediaries” maintaining the link between families and public institutions will be doubled.

**Housing:**

The funds of the Urban Regeneration Agency will be increased by 25% over two years.

**Education:**

The creation of 5,000 assistant teaching posts in 1,200 colleges in "sensitive neighbourhoods".

A doubling of the number of educational success teams foreseen by the social cohesion plan (1,000 at the end of 2007).

The possibility of entering an apprenticeship at the age of 14, rather than 16 at present.

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9 The local councillors of every political stripe are very sensitive to this part of the governmental programme. Each one fights to obtain financial means from the central state. In this connection, here is an extract from an article published in Le Monde on 5 November 2005:

With the redeployment of the local police, the councillors regret the reduction of the credits of the Intervention Funds for the town and of its subsidies to the associations present in the so-called sensitive areas. On 6 October, when she was still the Vice President of the National Council of Towns (CNV), Véronique Fayet, deputy (UDF) to the mayor of Bordeaux, deplored their reduction of 40% between 2004 and 2005. The government has certainly begun a reform of the Urban Solidarity Allocation (DSU), so as to bail out the finances of the poorest municipalities to the tune of 120 million additional euros per year over five years. But this oxygen mask must serve above all to improve the conditions of "everyday life" and not to "promote social ties in the estates”, said Mme Fayet. In Tourcoing, the number of police officers has gone from 350 to 150, and the removal of a state subsidy of 400,000 euros could affect the plan for educational success. In Sarcelles (Val-d’Oise), "the state credits to associations have fallen by 20% per year” since 2003, noted the Socialist Party mayor of the town, François Pupponi. Two of the biggest structures, Accueil et Culture ("Welcome and Culture") and Sarcelles-Jeunes ("Sarcelles-Youth"), have been forced to stop literacy courses and educational support through inability to pay staff. "It is dramatic”, fumed M. Pupponi, "With 30% unemployment in some neighbourhoods, we shouldn’t be allowed to lose a single euro". The gradual disappearance of youth jobs and the reduction of subsidised contracts harms the associations just as much. The "Support Funds for Integration and the Struggle Against Discrimination" (Fasild) have been redirected into the reception of new arrivals, where it supports numerous local initiatives. The result: the Muslim organisations step into the void. "We are witnessing a very clear advance of cultural associations” said a representative anonymously. "They are not islamists but they engage in proselytism. And, above all, they position themselves as spokespeople to the public authorities on social problems".
100,000 merit scholarships will be awarded after the school holidays in 2006, against 30,000 at present.

The opening of ten extra educational success boarding schools "for the most promising and most motivated pupils".

Health:
Development of town health centres to link up health workers. An increase in the resources of mobile psychosocial teams.

Integration:
The creation of an agency for social cohesion and equality of opportunity which will be the "spokesman for the mayors". The creation of administrators dedicated to equality of opportunity.

Associations:
A hundred million additional euros will be allocated to 14,000 associations subsidised by the state in 2006.

Security:
The Ministry of the Interior will recruit 2000 additional officers for the disadvantaged neighbourhoods, within the framework of contracts providing access to employment, starting in January 2006.

The Villepin operation is ambitious. Its general aim is "to repair social bonds in the sensitive urban areas", as a means of reinforcing various local decentralised bodies which are assigned to create a state net around proletarian neighbourhoods. The serious weakening of the political structures and local organisations of the parties of the left of capital has left a void which the state must fill. This will be achieved by various means, from the multiplication and diffusion of professional people charged with establishing an intermediary relation with the centralised parts of the state, to the revitalisation through subsidies of associations of all kinds, intended to organise and channel the discontent of the suburbs towards democratic forms and objectives.

By this plan the state shows that it has understood, and duly exploited, one of the most important limits of these incidents: the extremely separated nature of the violent reactions, which in turn calls for differentiated and local treatments. The mayors and the administrators thus see themselves as having the function of nerve centres in the operation of the state recovery of the working class periphery. The state also takes another step towards the "reactivation" of the unemployed by means of a more detailed and individualised monitoring of its jobless. The measures taken according to this plan, notably the lowering of the age of apprentices, the new economic incentives proposed to the long-term unemployed for them to find work and the establishment of new free zones (that is to say, zones subject to lower taxation), contributes to the well-advanced process of de-structuring of the labour market.

New insecure and/or under-paid figures will emerge into the light of day in perfect legality. As for the schooling system, the government will count exclusively on reinforcing the supervision and surveillance teams. No additional teachers and no increased study resources. By this it confirms that "National Education" in working class neighbourhoods comes down to a place for storing a potentially excess work force.

The anti-proletarian sense of the Villepin operation has nevertheless not been understood by many workers. According to the estate poll referred to earlier by the Parisien/Aujourd'hui en France, the re-establishment of the financing of associations working in the suburbs on housing and education aid is approved by 89% of those asked (9% against, 2% without an opinion). As for the lowering of the age of apprenticeship from 16 to 14, it is supported by 83% (16% against, 1% didn't say).

But the government won’t leave it there. Profiting from its advantage, because it has well and truly won a victory on the level of public opinion by profiting from the fear aroused by the events, it is going to announce (on 29 November) a collection of measures clearly directed against present and future immigrants. Let's note the essential points:
- Prolonging the two year delay after which a foreigner who has married a French citizen and is living with them can ask for French nationality. It will be four years for a couple resident in France, five if they are not,
- Prolonging to two years (it’s one at present) the time of residence in France after which it is possible to ask for family entry and settlement
- Systematic verification of respect for the law which forbids polygamy in France
- Additional selection of foreign students before their entry into France. "We must make sure that the best amongst them come to us and don’t go elsewhere" declared Villepin (it being understood that the "worst" won’t come),
- The fixing of four additional criteria in the granting of student visas: a study plan, academic and personal career, linguistic competence, state of bilateral relations with the country of origin.

More than this, it is a question of using these measures to test on the students the concept of "selected immigration" launched by Sarkozy, which is intended to be extended to "skilled workers" in a future immigration law. It fixes an objective of 25,000 immigrants in an irregular situation to be expelled in 2006. "France no longer wants those who aren’t wanted in any other part of the world" he says and continues to unveil the general philosophy of the legal project which he intends to put before Parliament at the beginning of 2006: "to bring imposed immigration under control so as to develop a selected immigration".

Sarkozy continues by judging that "social rights [for the immigrants] must not be superior in France to those provided elsewhere in Europe. These social rights must only be conceived of in a provisory manner, linked to a situation of urgency until the return to the country of origin" adding that "The illegal migrant does not have a right to residence but he does have the right to access to treatment through state medical aid, the right to schooling for his children and the right to emergency housing".

Carrying on, he confirms his desire to "break the automatic link between marriage and the right to residence" for foreigners in an irregular situation when they marry, while adding to this a suspensive measure – "The freedom to marry a foreigner in an irregular situation is constitutionally protected. But nothing prevents us from abolishing the automatic acquisition of a right to residence after the marriage!" – and linking family entry to the possession of "resources and housing".

Without any doubt these measures constitute an aggravation of the conditions of life of immigrants, whether "illegal" or "legal".

**In the opposition**

As for the left of capital, its critiques of the government cannot hide a profound identity of objectives on the essential thing: the re-establishment of order. On Sunday 6 November, reviving its long repressive tradition, the PCF called "for the re-establishment of order". "The propagation of acts of violence is unacceptable for the populations concerned. Order must be re-established. It is urgent to take a series of measures which will allow us to put an end to a more and more dangerous development. The security of everyone cannot be re-established by accepting the escalation of violence", wrote the Stalinist party. On the same day the president of the Plaine municipality, Patrick Braouzec, called to be received by the Prime Minister and demanded a "Grenelle of working class neighbourhoods". The national unity of salvation advances...

In the Stalinist camp the gold police medal must go without contest to the deputy mayor of Vénissieux, André Gérin, who addressed a letter dated 7 November to Jacques Chirac. Here it is:

> Monsieur President,
> I subscribe to your proposals for re-establishing order. French society is drifting. The Republic is threatened. We can see the germs of civil war peeping out. There can be no hesitation: re-establishing order is the priority.

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11 The government justifies this by the fact that "family settlement is today the second source of legitimate immigration after marriage. It involved 25,000 people in 2004, a number which has been stable for several years".

12 The government thus echoes the most extreme reactionaries who see in polygamy one of the causes, if not the cause, of the events.

13 The number of deportations of foreigners in irregular situations has strongly increased: 12,000 in 2003, 15,000 in 2004 and 20,000 in 2005.

14 A community grouping eight towns of Seine-Saint-Denis: Aubervilliers, Epinay-sur-Seine, La Courneuve, l’Ile-Saint-Denis, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, Saint-Denis, Stains and Villetteune.

15 Translator’s Note - it was the Grenelle Accords between the unions and the government which ended the May ’68 revolt.
All the political leaders, of the left as well as the right, must speak with the same voice. The hour is at hand for republican unity to eradicate the gangrene, the barbarism, the savagery. We must put an end to social and moral deterioration, the compost which grows hatred and violence.

France is torn. On the one side is a working class youth which is sunk in poverty, which feels useless, rejected, sacrificed, entombed in a terrifying "no future". On the other, there is an opulent France keeping the fruits of growth and employment to itself while remaining deaf.

Each according to their convictions must give reasons for hope, to say to the youth: "France needs you, you need France." I am for a republican front where each political party of the left and the right is committed to uniting social and economic progress.

I propose that the Government puts in place an "Orsec plan" for the next six months associating all the political leaders and the mayors of the towns of France which are the most concerned.

Let’s announce as national priorities the battle for full employment and education on all fronts. These are more than ever the keys to the future.

Some measures to discuss:
- Free up some funds in the 2006 budget to take immediate measures against poverty and negative discrimination,
- Sort out at all costs the 16/18 year olds with nothing to do.
- Without training, without jobs, left to themselves, easy prey, they can fall into despair and hate. They are at the heart of the crisis.
- Reunite the thousands of economic actors with the authorities in each département here at the end of November to break the taboos which block employment.
- Begin the generalisation of paid apprenticeships, from the age of 14, in liaison with the colleges.
- Mobilise the 22 regions of France and the national structures to orient training towards employment in a voluntarist fashion.
- Monsieur President of the Republic, since the years 1974/1975 France has regressed. You were the Prime Minister. Finance is turned against employment, against the social, creating terrible fractures which you yourselves have echoed.
- All the accompanying policies have ended in stinging failure. The blindness of all economic, of all financial policies has created the fractures.
- It is a matter of urgency to reconcile social progress and economic progress, to join together industry, employment, social issues, at the same time.
- There was an electric shock on 21 April 2002 and more recently on 29 May from millions of French people who expressed their rejection of elites and the political class, testifying to a profound feeling of abandonment.
- The hour has come for mobilisation at all levels of society. The situation is serious. I love France and I am not afraid of going beyond the partisan spirit. The polemics of politicians and their personal rivalries are pathetic. We need a republican front to assure in the continuity of public security the civil defence of the citizens.

Monsieur President of the Republic, we will win the battle to maintain order by responding to the cry of the youth, to the cry of the working classes who no longer accept living behind the bars of poverty, exclusion and contempt. We are on the verge of an explosion.

It is up to us to say to the youth of France that there is a chance. We must have the courage to look them straight in the eye for them to recover their pride. We owe them firmness but also consideration, affection. They are entitled to expect us to be exemplary.

Here, it seems to me, is the message which must be born by the President of the Republic and his government.

Please accept, Monsieur President of the Republic, the expression of my high esteem for you.

André GERIN
PCF Deputy Mayor of Vénissieux

The PS call for more police stations and more so-called local police. "The disappearance of local police is a grave error. The officers involved in this task had little by little gained the trust of our citizens… Yet urgency demands the return to a climate of calm, in Clichy-sous-Bois and in the neighbouring municipalities. This requires, notably, the presence of a police station which we have ceaselessly, vainly, asked for", said Claude Dilain, mayor of Clichy-sous-Bois and vice president of the National Council of Towns (CNV).

The LCR, for its part, called for a return of "the democratic and progressive forces to the suburbs". It supported organising with them "a peaceful march, leaving the neighbourhoods to demand the resignation of Sarkozy and the measures necessary for a life which
is social, solidaric and collective". These Trotskyists forgot rather too quickly that many of the municipalities targeted by these incidents are administered by their same friends on the left of capital, the PS and PCF, valiant defenders of the reestablishment of order. Masters in the art of doing the splits, unconcerned about demonstrating any kind of coherence, the Trotskyists of the LCR, after expressing themselves in favour of marches in white, incited proletarians to brave the curfew. Naturally, as is their habit, they did not take any action and, fortunately, the workers understood instructions of the leftists for what they were: wind.

"The everyday violence in these neighbourhoods is perhaps the work of hoodlums and drug dealers", opined Arlette Laguiller, spokesperson for Lutte ouvrière. "But why have the hoodlums, they are always there, found the support of a good part of the youth today? Why do the explosions of violence following each other against the police involve far more youths than just the little caïds of the neighbourhood? Because there isn’t a single youth in these neighbourhoods who hasn’t realised that in the eyes of Sarkozy’s police, the ‘scum’ are the poor, all the poor, and not only some hoodlums and drug dealers. Because, for most of them, the future is blocked and without hope” she continued.

Beyond stating the obvious, the only solution which she puts forward is for the youth of the poor neighbourhoods to wait for the message of the working class while it recovers its capacity to react to the offensive of the bosses and the government. Just one question. Are not the "youths" involved in the confrontations themselves, in the great majority of cases, proletarians? It’s a bit mean to propose to sectors of the population who live in a permanent state of acute destitution that they wait. In this connection, what of the old demand of Lutte Ouvrière for "more police truly linked to the population"?16

Besides their joint work as social fire extinguishers, the left and the right of capital share the task of dramatising the phenomenon. This is part of a well-established tradition in France. They justify themselves above all by the "eruptive character" of the subordinate classes in this country. Once again, as in May 1968, the dominant classes in France know that relying on the deterioration of the situation and simple repression is not enough to restore established order. On the contrary... It is therefore above all from necessity and from consciousness of the danger that the executive power decided to not "underestimate" the events unfolding in the suburbs. A sort of plan of preventive for the security of the population itself, and they will certainly not renounce any of the windfall which feeds private profits from the coffers of the state". (Lutte Ouvrière, no.1765, 24 May 2002)

"The policy of state budgetary restrictions has led in its turn to a degradation of public services. Insufficient public transport, a lack of staff in the post offices and in educational establishments, and the almost complete disappearance of police officers in working class neighbourhoods, have added to the general degradation. And we add to all this the retreat of the presence of militants and workers’ organisations which developed sentiments of solidarity and maintained a certain pride in belonging to the world of work, which has today largely disappeared. So, if we really want to attack the problem at its root, we have to start by giving the means to the public services, which they certainly need, and why not recruit bus drivers and postal workers from among the inhabitants of the estates? As for the tasks of the police indispensable to collective life, they must be assured by people sufficiently close to the inhabitants of the neighbourhood where they are assigned so as to be able to defuse conflicts well. This would be far preferable to those police patrols which, failing to ensure a real presence, immediately go for tough-guy tactics when the tension mounts. To educate, to ensure the integration of the youth, to develop public services, to create real jobs, to turn back the march of social degradation which we are seeing, all this can be done with the support and collaboration of the population. But obviously, even if that was done, even with an effort sustained over a long time, it would take time to get back on our feet from the social degradation of the of recent years". (Lutte Ouvrière, no.1764, 17 May 2002)

16 "A few months ago, the Jospin government wiped away the discontent of the police and gendarmes, elsewhere stirred up by the right. On some TV reports we could see what a state of dilapidation a number of police stations were in or hear some officers tell of how, in the Essonne region for example, of 250 police vehicles, neither powerful nor of recent vintage, 50 were permanently immobilised for repair. But even this situation will not change, despite the securitarian poses of Sarkozy and Chirac. Because if the bourgeoisie and its state have need of a police force, it is to provide their own security against the population and not

17 "In this suspicious, eruptive country, the smallest movement costs the authorities a great deal of energy to avoid a crowd of malcontents immediately coalescing against them. The authoritites can therefore no longer act. They fidget. They occupy space, stand on the stage, taking in the looks which everyone turns on them, without ever allowing them the slightest respite. It is necessary to explain, to justify, to convince even before being able to do, always menaced by doubt, bad faith, being judged on intention alone, rumours" (Dominique de Villepin, in The cry of the Gargoyle, page 88, Albin Michel, 2002).
counter-revolution has thus been put in place. The second reason for this strong reaction on the side of the state consists in the fact that the present foundation of the executive is not sufficiently solid and extensive. A sort of national catharsis ending in a patriotic unity rediscovered around the events could very well be what the rulers of the country are after. This recipe, let’s not forget, is the one that was so successful for Gaullism and the Fifth Republic. The objective, clearly set out by several party leaders, is that of a national front in defence of common republican values. This front would reunite the left and the right, paving the way towards a full and complete restoration of state authority. What are the components of this front in formation?

A common front for the re-establishment of the authority of the state

The political parties

The context of urban violence is favourable for the formation of a social reactionary bloc constructed on the basis of more or less spontaneous reactions. Behind the official appeal to good will, the formation of militias is taking shape. Manuel Aeschlimann, the UMP mayor of Asnières (Hauts-de-Seine), has created an “Asnières citizens’ watch committee”. To the volunteers who met at 9 p.m. in front of the town hall, it is necessary to give "means of telephonic communication, cameras and fire extinguishers". For the mayor, the time has come to ”let the whingers wallow in their politically correct passivity”. However, only thirty or so turned up in the whole town. Above all it was a media operation. On the side of the left, Gilles Poux, PCF mayor of La Courneuve marched under the banner of “stop the violence”, with community associations and representatives of the public services.

Manuel Valls, PS deputy mayor of Evry, solicited the active support of the population. This was also done by Michel Pajon. The (PS) mayor of Noisy-le-Grand (Seine-Saint-Denis) wrote to his administrators: “I call for the mobilisation of all those who want to defend our town. Without substituting themselves for the forces of the police, the Noisy inhabitants who want to participate in the protection of their living space(...) can meet up in the course of the next few nights, with your mobilised representatives, inside or in front of schools, gymniasums, crèches, buildings for everyone.” A great deal preceded this appeal – the total destruction of the gymnasium, and more than thirty cars burned. “Each night is a cause for concern”, observed Manuel Valls. From their offices, transformed into crisis centres, they are in permanent liaison with the mayors of surrounding municipalities (of all stripes), the fire brigade and the police. Each one watches the slightest incident and fears the worst. “We have to keep control”, said Michel Pajon who called for the use of troops. From now on they all call for private security companies or for social mediation. “They are in t-shirts, cool, but I have come to understand that these men have themselves become subjected to a powerful control”, sighed Gilbert Roger, the PS mayor of Bondy, just before midnight.18

Roger was originally responsible, with Claude Bartolone, the MP for Seine-Saint-Denis, Claude Dilain, the mayor of Clichy-sous-Bois and Franck Puponi, mayor of Sarcelles, for an appeal signed by a few dozen elected Socialists, including Bertrand Delanoë, mayor of Paris. Launched outside the party, this text mixes in everything by calling for “a rapid return to civil peace” and emergency measures beginning with the “re-establishment of the authority of the state”.

To accelerate the return to “civil peace”, mayors of the right and the left and various associations called for the organised vigilance of groups of citizens. Groups of inhabitants of the estates thus watched over their territory, in particular public buildings targeted for damage (schools, crèches, cultural centres and other places). In the great majority of cases these initiatives were not transformed into the creation of militias auxiliary to the forces of repression. However, it is important to remember that the dominant classes had openly envisaged the constitution of groupings of citizens charged with protecting public places and establishing an information network for the police.

The Islamic organisations

Like the other associations, they tried to consolidate their role as unions of the suburbs in relation to the state. Very present on the ground (30 beards for 8 municipal mediators in Grigny, for example), the religious people mostly played for a

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18 See Le Monde of 08/11/2005
return to calm. The Union des organisations islamiques de France (UOIF) called for young Muslims involved to “calm their anger, to mull things over and to conform to the fatwa” decreed in the aftermath of the events. In this fatwa “it is formally forbidden for any Muslim seeking divine satisfaction and grace to participate in any action which blindly attacks private or public property or which can endanger the lives of others”. “Contributing to these acts of violence is a forbidden act” the text continues. “Any Muslim living in France, whether he is a French citizen or a guest, has the right to demand the scrupulous respect of his person, his dignity and his convictions and to act for more equality and social justice”, it concluded. The UOIF condemned the violence “with the utmost firmness” and called “insistently for a return to calm in the shortest possible time”. According to the UOIF, these events “seem to lay bare the grave deficiencies of the French model of integration which obviously plunges ten of thousands of young people from difficult neighbourhoods into despair and misery”. The UOIF supports the organisation of a national conference on the suburbs and youth.

The intervention of UOIF provoked an immediate response from the web site oumma.com, the principal French language Muslim site. “This fatwa concocted by the UOIF, only serves to communise and confessionalyse social problems, thus giving credence to the view that the motivations of the ‘smashers’ can be explained by their supposed Islamicness: they are delinquents because they are above all Muslims or rather, according to the statements of the UOIF, ‘bad Muslims’, because the smashers do not conform to the verses of the Koran”.

Oumma.com accused the UOIF of having become a “security auxiliary to the Ministry of the Interior” or even of playing the role of “French Islam’s CRS”. More traditional, the Union des mosquées Rhône-Alpes (Umra) declared itself available for “any step towards civil harmony” in the suburbs. But without "any wish to replace economic and social policies", according to its president and rector of the Lyon mosque, Kamel Kabtane. "The Union of Rhône-Alpes Mosques ardently calls for the return to calm and renews its availability for any step towards civil harmony. On the other hand, it refuses to take a position which does not belong to it and has no wish to replace the economic and social policies which alone can convince the youth of the suburbs that they are also the youth of France”.

The associations
On the television channel TF1, on 7 November, Dominique de Villepin executed a spectacular volte-face: “We have reduced the contributions to the associations in recent years,” he recognised with an astonishing frankness, “well, we are going to restore this contribution, whether it is a question of the big associations or the little ones which are in contact with everyday life and helping with housing and schooling”. If the money promised by the Prime Minister is effectively released, this will constitute a breath of fresh air for the local players who, for three years, have been in the habit of orienting themselves to the local authorities whose means can in no way compare with those of the state. The result is that the associations have found themselves confronted with “an enormous paradox”, according to Jean-Pierre Worms, president of the FONDA19: “In the present crisis the public authorities need citizens to mobilise themselves in an associative form and, at the same time, the means of the associations have been drastically diminished”. Dominique de Villepin seems to have got the message.

The result is that 100 million euros will be released in 2006 for the associations, considered as “an indispensable complement to the action of the state”. “Recognising that the subsidies have been withdrawn and wanting to re-establish them is all well and good, but when the associations have disappeared it will not be so simple to repair the social fabric”, declared Pierre Henry, director of France Terre d’Asile20.

The analysis and the position of communists
It goes without saying that for communists the central question is not to contest the use of force. The condition which the proletariat is put in by capitalist social relations cries out for its most determined use, now and always. Transformatory violence thus remains a firm point of the class struggle and a central element of the revolution-

19 An association, founded in 1981, which is in charge of promoting the associations law of 1901.
20 An organisation which campaigns for the rights of refugees. It has almost 300 staff and is partly funded by the EU.
ary programme. There is thus no place for stigmatising rioters because they have chosen this terrain. Nor do we associate ourselves with populations who demand the restoration of social peace by capitalist troops.

In the same way, we think that the network of associations and religious organisations plays above all a role of co-opting and neutralising subversive impulses which might emerge. Veritable forward observation posts of the state, they live off its often generous aid and they diffuse ideologies, secular or otherwise, of submission. The proletariat is not a sick body which needs to be treated with the opium of the beyond or the Republic.

So, we do not waste time analysing the events to see if they are justified. Many rioters have said that they have used the death of the two adolescents from Clichy-sous-Bois as a pretext to revolt against their situation. "The deaths of the two youths and the tear gas bomb fired at the Clichy-Montfermeil mosque were only a detonator", a young rioter from Sevran in the Paris suburbs explained to a journalist from the Parisien. The desire of this minority of young people to express as loudly as possible their rage against the forces of repression is completely comprehensible and justified. "We have to put up with checkpoints and insults for nothing. They treat us like cattle. We have nothing to lose. They don't care what they arrest us for", said other youths. There's nothing to add to these points. The problem is not this but in the fact that the informal political expression of this urban violence is not compatible with the perspective of independent proletarian struggle.

All sorts of contaminations, not necessarily expressing themselves in the present confrontations, constitute a backdrop to them, of such a kind that it is not possible to defend them as such. Let's review them without compromise:

- Tribalism dominates the environment of these neighbourhoods. The frequent wars between gangs, criminal organisations most often founded on an ethnic and/or territorial basis, shows this;
- Machismo and violence against young women, who hope to leave these hellish places in one way or another, have dangerously increased. "The only thing which counts is money, sex and the law of the strongest. They can kill you just because you refuse to give them a cigarette", said the 43 year old Cameroonian Pierre N'Doh to the weekly Le Point. He was the founder of the Organisation des banlieues unies in 1990. At the time it "wanted to federate the estates of the Paris region to influence the policies of the city";
- The black economy of drugs and stolen goods has taken a central place in many neighbourhoods, reinforcing parallel structures of social control based on the absolute power of the caïds. "In the estates there is no longer anything but the black economy". Consequently, "those who go to work every morning hug the walls. They no longer have respect. Here, to be called a victim is an insult", says Pierre N'Doh;
- "The islamisation of souls" has made some headway. The reaction following the tear gas in the Clichy-Montfermeil mosque bears eloquent testimony to this. The reactionary myth of the holy warrior seems to have a good press, including amongst sectors of youth who don't follow the precepts of the Koran. As a structuring factor in an environment where the family is breaking up under the blows of capitalist social relations, Is-

21 In 1998, the police chief Lucienne Bui-Trong, then head of the towns and suburbs section of the RG [Renseignements généraux – a branch of the French police dealing with political security], created a Richter Scale of urban violence which classified neighbourhoods from 1 to 8 according to their explosive potential. In the following year this tool gave birth to Saivu, the System of Computer Analysis of Urban Violence. From the first year Saivu recorded 28,858 acts of urban violence against 3000 in 1992, and 818 sensitive neighbourhoods in place of 106 previously. Disturbing tendencies were then confirmed, such as the phenomenon of violent gangs, the black economy, arson, and attacks on anything which symbolised authority. As the mercury continued to rise, the National Police Headquarters decided to scuttle Saivu, which finally disappeared in 2003" (Le Point, 4 November 2005).

22 A marriage between staircase gangs and the recognition of "ethnic" origins.

23 It is obvious that people don't die every day because they refuse a cigarette, but this miscellaneous fact, even if it is only the tip of the iceberg, reveals the permanent tension which rules in some suburbs.

24 We should remember however that for thousands of workers, precarious or not, "deals" of all kinds are necessary to supplement their normally insufficient or unpredictable salary, whether they are sellers or buyers. It is not a matter of morality but of necessity.
lam provides ideological reasons for opposing yourself to the "whites" and for subjugating women, who are generally more inclined to benefit from the dissolution of the tribal family by gaining the advantage of individual freedom. The imagery of holy war against the West has some success. "It's a little Baghdad every evening", says Draman, a 17 year old inhabitant of Aulnaysous-Bois, originally from Mali, to a journalist from the Parisien. Over the course of the recent events, Muslim organisations absent from the incidents are putting themselves forward (not without success, notably in Clichy-sous-Bois and Montfermeil) as mediators. They want to be defenders of the rioters' reasons while encouraging the latter to delegate negotiations with the state to them25.

This is why the context makes us say that these beginnings of riots have little in common with the first season of revolts which began in Vénissieux in 1981 and which culminated in Vaulx-en-Velin in October 1990.

On 6 October 1990, a motorbike overturned at a police roadblock which tried to stop it. The death of the passenger, a disabled youth, Thomas Claudio, unleashed the anger of the youth of Vaulx-en-Velin. Confrontations with the police took place, the burning and looting of the shopping centre followed. On 8 October 1990, Le Progrés de Lyon ran the headline: "Vaulx-en-Velin. The riot". The following phrase comes from the article on the inside pages: "Nine years after Vénissieux, the disease of the suburbs has never been cured". The daily Libération of 8 October 1990 said: "In Lyons there is a long list of victims which yesterday fed the anger of the young rioters. In October '82, Wahid Hachichi (Vaulx-en-Velin) and Ahmed Bouafia (Bron) were killed. In November '82, the policeman Bernard Taffine beat Mohamed Abidou. Case dismissed. On 6 March '85, Barded Barka, 15 years old (Vaulx-en-Velin) is killed at a checkpoint. The policeman is transferred. Mustapha Kacir (Vaulx-en-Velin) is beaten by two gendarmes in June '85. No judicial consequences. In September '85, Noredine Mechta is done in by the police, according to Larbi Chouaieb, president of the Muslim Federation of Clichy-Montfermeil, thanks to "dialogue" led by the mediators appointed by the mayor and the Muslim community.

25 Calm returned on Sunday 29 October, in Clichy-sous-Bois, according to Larbi Chouaieb, president of the Muslim Federation of Clichy-Montfermeil, thanks to "dialogue" led by the mediators appointed by the mayor and the Muslim community.

26 Cf. the long analysis of the insurrection in Los Angeles published in Mouvement Communiste number 4 (winter 1992/1993). This text is available on the site http://www.-mouvement-communiste.com

It is this perspective that we still defend today. It is not necessary to ask the young proletarians of the suburbs to wait, as the helpless Lutte ouvrrière
do, for the workers to get moving so that they can move in their turn. This vision implies that unemployed people or workers trapped in "little jobs" cannot really be part of the working class. They are a sort of feather-brained mass which it is necessary to control rather than assist in organising themselves. But it is also necessary to fight against the vision which wants these "new" proletarians to be sufficient in themselves. As long as the division remains between them and the "traditional" workers in more stable jobs, the only winners will be capital and the exploiters.

This is why it is necessary to work for the cessation of acts which only aggravate the already difficult situation of the working class. Only the direct intervention, determined and without concessions, of conscious sectors of the proletariat can produce results which do not give grist to the state's mill. If the opposite happens, it will just reinforce the tendency towards normalisation.

As for proletarians scared by urban violence, it is necessary that combative workers remind them that the principal source of all their ills is in the existing relations of production, in a society divided into classes. Attacking wealth wherever it is found, fighting the vampiric employers – those who make us work on the black, with greater flexibility and for lower wages –, fighting for better wages and more acceptable conditions of work, ridding working class neighbourhoods of the sellers of artificial dreams (drug dealers, preachers and various defenders of the state), openly fighting against machismo and tribalism, uniting with other workers in struggle whenever the occasion presents itself, whatever their origins, and, finally, organising ourselves in an independent way to reinforce the autonomous political struggle of the working classes, these are a few lines sketching out the revival of the class struggle in the working class peripheries.

Brussels-Paris, 1 December 2005

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Take a look at the Mouvement Communiste website: http://www.mouvement-communiste.com

What Did Happen After The Riots?

The letter of Mouvement Communiste reproduced in this newsletter gives a political analysis of the November-December "events" and their causes. The following article of Ni patrie ni frontières tries to complete the preceding article on three subjects: the offensive of the French Right after the riots; a criticism of some myths spread in the foreign medias about the role of French migrants and their descendents in the "riots"; and a quick story of immigration in France with some basic datas to understand its importance in French society.

The offensive of the French Right

Two months after the end of the "riots", one has the impression that nothing occurred in France. 80 percent of French people are convinced that the government has not taken any concrete measures to deal with the problems which caused the riots, and will not do it in the near future. And one can also add that the traditional Left and the radical Left seem to have already forgotten what happened, bemused as they are by 2007 presidential elections.

Almost no solidarity with the adults in jail and minors under state surveillance

Apart from a petition asking for a general amnesty and a small weekly meeting in Toulouse and Paris, very little has been done. A demonstration regrouped 200 people in front of a Parisian jail (La Santé) on the 31st December 2005 and that’s about it. Each party of the Left and Far Left is now planning to have its own candidate for the 2007 presidential elections, so probably there will be at least 5 candidates for the Left1 and inside the SP a violent battle is raging between the numerous male candidates (nicknamed the "elephants" of the Party) and a Blairite woman leader.

One group of the Far Left (the Trotskyist LCR, Revolutionary Communist League) campaigned in some suburbs with the help of actors, stand-up comedians and rap musicians to convince young

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1 One Communist Party, one Socialist Party, one Green and two Trotskyist candidates.
people to vote for next elections. Even if the first and only meeting they organised in Clichy-sous-Bois was not welcome by the local youth who criticized this initiative, it was relatively “successful” because 500 new electors got enlisted in a town of 15,000 inhabitants. But it’s difficult to imagine how social problems, which have not been dealt with for 30 years, will be magically solved after the next elections.

The Right takes the initiative

If the Left and Far Left were and are still passive as regards the working class youth, the Right has taken a whole series of initiatives, either symbolic measures (like the creation of a commemoration day for the abolition of slavery, or the suppression of one article of a law praising the “positive role of French presence” in its former colonies), or very concrete measures (against unemployment benefits and for a new two-year labour contract) which will influence and affect both French and foreign young workers. The Right wing has also adopted an aggressive and dynamic attitude towards the question of national unity, in the “Gaullist” tradition, hailing France’s capacity to offer an attractive national model, able to reunite the descendents of the French slaveholders and settlers, the descendents of the Revolutionary republicans led by the Enlightenment philosophers, and the descendents of the former colonized people. Cocorico!

The debate about slavery and French colonial past

Just after the riots, a new federation was created: the CRAN (Representative Council of the Black Associations). Imitating the CRIF (Representative council of the Jewish institutions) and the CFCM (French Council of the Muslim Cult), 60 small associations decided to introduce the “Black question” into the French political debate. They were pushed to adopt this attitude by the success of a law recognizing slavery as a crime against humanity adopted in 2001 and also by deeper changes in French colonial past. The Right in particular has been dealing with slavery issues for 30 years, will be magically solved after the next elections.

Since the 1970s, the attitude of both Africans and French West Indians living in Metropolitan France has radically changed. Their associations have progressively modified their politics, specially the West Indians who don’t fight anymore against West Indian immigration into Metropolitan France but try to better their situation here, and act as a pressure group both on local West Indian and on French politics. The same is true also for some African or North African “communities”: for example, the Malian associations decided to influence the transformation of Malian society from abroad through all sorts of projects linked to NGOs, and not to limit their activities to the hope of returning “home” one day.

2 The suburb where the 2 young guys were electrocuted on the 27th October, the event which started the riots.

3 Since the 1970s, the attitude of both Africans and French West Indians living in Metropolitan France has radically changed. Their associations have progressively modified their politics, specially the West Indians who don’t fight anymore against West Indian immigration into Metropolitan France but try to better their situation here, and act as a pressure group both on local West Indian and on French politics. The same is true also for some African or North African “communities”: for example, the Malian associations decided to influence the transformation of Malian society from abroad through all sorts of projects linked to NGOs, and not to limit their activities to the hope of returning “home” one day.

4 This law basically served the practical interests of the former French settlers and their Algerian collaborators – “harkis” – during the Algerian war: they are particularly numerous in the South of France, and thus important electorally.
colonial past in order to recreate a new national unity.

So strangely enough, the November-December riots pushed the Right to make three symbolic gestures towards the French-West Indians or French-Africans who feel discriminated because of the colour of their skin. It also helped the Right to adopt an officially anti-racist and even slightly anti-colonialist attitude (as regards the past, not the present course of French imperialism obviously). These measures did not cost anything to the State, but they were an answer to all the "rioters" who had shown their French ID to French and foreign TV cameras and explained that this document did not protect them against racist discrimination in France. And these measures were also directed towards those who will vote in 2007, specifically the West Indians who have an important role in electoral politics both in Metropolitan France and in the French West Indies.

The Right did not only adopt these symbolic measures, it also decided to launch all its forces in an offensive against unemployed, foreign illegals and young wage-earners.

The official statistics of unemployment go down and the number of poor goes up

Unemployment is a permanent structural feature of French economy and one of the factors which can explain the November-December riots. Youth unemployment is quite high (23 percent is the most quoted statistics, as opposed to 11 percent for all age categories), specially for unqualified workers, and among them for French-Africans or French-North Africans (see below the annex about immigration in France).

So the government made a lot of noise about its "new social measures in favour of the unemployed" while in 2005, 200,000 people have been deprived of their unemployment benefits. And in 2006, thanks to its new decisions, 100,000 people will loose 11 months of unemployment benefits and 50,000 will loose 6 months of their unemployment benefits. So the perspectives for unemployed in general are grim: 90 percent of them get less than the minimum wage (1,357 euros per month before taxes). And the bluff of the right-wing is easily revealed by the fact that the number of people getting the RMI\(^5\) has climbed up 7 percent last year.

A new labour contract for people under 26 (CPE) reinforces youth precarity

This CPE (First Hiring Contract)\(^6\) is a new breach in the Labour Code which will enable a boss to pay no social charges to the State for 3 years. If last year the government favored small businesses (under 20 employees) with a contract called CNE (New Hiring Contract)\(^7\), this year it targets all companies over 20 employees and gives them the possibility of renewing this new contract several times. The advantage of the CPE is that the employee can be fired without any reason and at any time.

As regards temporary training periods inside enterprises, which are so vital for young people who are leaving high school or university because they have no job experience, the government has made a lot of noise about "the most social and protective measures" ever taken, because it decided to oblige the bosses to pay these training periods after 3 months... But it knows very well that they usually last much less!

And to top it all, the government has authorized young people who are 15 years old to work on night shifts.

So, two months after the end of the riots, the future looks quite grim for the working class youth. Hopefully the 400,000 people who demonstrated against the government on February the 7th, in all France, will continue their fight and resistance to the offensive of the State in the next months and enlarge the movement.\(^8\)

5 Minimum Insertion Revenue, 433 euros per month for a single person, attributed to the 1,4 million of people who are not "allowed" to receive unemployment benefits.
6 Contrat Première Embauche
7 Contrat Nouvelle Embauche
8 For more details about the French riots see the article in French "Dancing with the wolves" (http://www.mondialisme.org/article.php3?id_article=569) or the special issue of the French journal *ni patrie ni frontières (no.15) (http://www.mondialisme.org/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=68)"
Annex: Information on immigrants and the suburbs

Immigration

France has always been a country of immigration. Between 1851 and 1911, the percentage of immigrants rose from 1 percent to 3 percent of French population. These immigrants were mainly Belgian, Italian and Spanish. In the 20th century, the first important wave of immigration took place between 1920 and 1930. So the percentage of immigrants rose from 3 to 6.6 percent in 1931. In the 1930s, there was an important arrival of Polish workers (600,000) and Spanish people (500,000) after the defeat of the Spanish Revolution.

These numbers can give the impression that Muslims were not an important religious minority in France before the Second World War. But one must take into account the French Empire (Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia but also Western and Central Africa). Until the independence, in 1962, Algeria was considered as a French department (i.e. a part of French territory and nation); but the Algerians were not French citizens so they were deprived of the right to vote.

They were called Muslims, but that word described them as an ethnic, not as a religious group. This is why in Algeria you had the strange concept of "Christian Muslims". The non-recognition of Muslim religion by the French state has therefore a long history. After the Second World War the percentage of immigrants rose from 4.4 percent in 1945 to 6.6 percent in 1975. So it reached more or less the level of the 1930s. This percentage has not changed much in the last 30 years: today immigrants represent 7.4 percent of the French population.

To appreciate exactly how many foreigners live in France, it is necessary to make a distinction between foreigners and immigrants. An immigrant is somebody who was born abroad and came to France but may become French rather quickly. A foreigner is somebody who has a foreign passport and therefore is not a French citizen.

Immigrants regularly become French and their children are automatically "naturalized" if they are born in France. That's why we can consider the question of immigration from three different points of views, which give way to 3 different statistics, which fit into each other like Russian puppets. In France there are: 3.6 million foreigners, or 4.3 million immigrants, or 6.1 million persons living in a family where either the father or the mother is a migrant.

The main "non European nationalities" are roughly: Algerians: 600,000 - Moroccans: 600,000 - Tunisians: 200,000 - Turks: 200,000 - Africans: 300,000 (the African population has tripled between 1982 and 1990, and once more doubled since then). The main "European" communities are: Portuguese: 600,000 - Italians: 200,000 - Spanish: 200,000.

In we take into account all the immigrants the non Europeans represent today 55 percent and the Europeans 45 percent. Since 1990 the non European migrants represent therefore a small majority of the immigrant population.

To these immigrants one must add those who are French by birth but come from the French DOM-TOM: Guadeloupe, Martinique, Polynesia, New Caledonia. The 400,000 French West Indians represent an important fraction of the poorly-qualified employees of the public sector (postal services and hospitals). But none of them is considered as a migrant!

The percentage of women among immigrants is much higher than before 1974 because the frontiers have been closed in July 1974 for "non Europeans" and only family immigration and asylum seekers are allowed to enter. This element can explain why the problem of the hijab has taken more importance recently, but that’s not the only reason and probably not the main one.

Important discriminations

Immigrants coming from the "South" are victims of all sorts of discriminations as the statistics show. They are mainly employed in the car industry, building industry, cleaning sector and hospitals in lowly-paid jobs. 20 percent of the non-qualified workers are foreigners. 46 percent of foreigners are workers (as opposed to 26 percent of French people). 80 percent of the Turks are workers, 50 percent of the Algerians and Tunisians belong to the working class.

These discriminations had also affected the previous waves of immigration but it did not give birth to a religious movement of protest, because
the majority of the Italian, Polish and Spanish immigrants were sharing the same religion as the dominant one in France: catholicism, but it probably not the case of the North Africans.

Part-time jobs and unemployment 42 percent of migrant women have a part-time job as opposed to 31 percent of French women. 20 percent of migrant men are unemployed as opposed to 10 percent of French men. 23 percent of migrant women are unemployed as opposed to 14 percent of French women.

Rate of unemployment (year 2000) according to the nationality

Born in France: 11 percent - Born abroad but naturalized: 14 percent - Algerians: 30.8 percent - Moroccans: 35.8 percent - Tunisians: 19.5 percent - Other Africans: 25.6 percent Marriages

40 percent of the African migrants are Muslim. Polygamy is practiced only among the Mandés who represent 25 percent of the African immigrants. 50 percent of the boys and 25 percent of the girls born in Algeria but living in France marry with a French citizen whose two parents were born in France. Turkish men and women rarely marry French citizens, even they have been brought up in France.

Suburb population

The suburbs were not specially constructed for migrants or to hide (as I read in an American newspaper) "the coloured populations" from the White French working class! The estates were constructed to receive three different kinds of populations:
- the former French farmers who became workers in the 1950s and 1960s (remember that France was still a country where the majority of the population lived and worked on the countryside in 1945),
- the former settlers ("Pieds Noirs") of Algeria when they arrived after 1963 as well as the "harkis"
- the foreign workers when they came to work and live with their families (if not, they were housed in shanty towns, or overpopulated "foyers" for singles).

The mass of the population living in French suburbs was and is not composed mainly of migrants or foreigners coming from the "post-colonial world". It is composed of workers.

In 2002, 32 percent of migrant families lived in their own house, 66 percent in collective buildings (private or state owned) and 2 percent in hotel rooms, "provisional buildings" (trailers, slums, barracks on building sites).

Migrant families (with either a migrant father or mother as the head of the family, the other being either French, either also a migrant) represent only 18 percent of the population of 4.7 million people living in the ZUS (Sensitive Urban Zones: working class areas, generally in the suburbs) and only 16 percent of the persons living in the state-owned estates.

These statistics show that the medias don’t know what they are talking about when they compare French state or private-owned estates with American ghettos.

One can have the impression that these estates are mainly populated by migrants only if one focuses on some "mono-ethnic" buildings: one tower with mainly Africans, another building with mainly Turks, one street with a majority of West Indians, etc. But basically, until now, French and foreign workers mix in all the senses of the word, geographical and social. The rate of so-called "inter-ethnic" marriages (50 percent for the North Africans, for example) in France after 50 years of presence can’t be compared with the American one (7 percent for Black men, 2.5 percent for Black women) after several centuries. This situation may change in the future, but that remains to be seen.

Yves (Ni patrie ni frontières)