Illegalized Migrants and Trade Unions
A strike in Paris

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Structure of presentation

- Industrial relations in France
- Trade unions and migrant struggles
- Strike movement in Paris 2008 - 2010
- Victories and contradictions of the movement
Industrial Relations in France

- Part of „Southern European Group“ [2]
- French trade unionism marked by ideological divisions
- CGT historically dominant trade union
- French unionisation rate fairly low
- Confrontational measures and strikes
Trade Union Density

**Figure:** Trade Union Density Sweden, Italy, Germany and France (OECD)
Trade unions and migrant struggles

- Trade unions and migrants – a contradictory relationship?
- Most trade unions in the Global North have given up restrictive positions towards migration and migrants [3]
- Trade union membership of migrants remains low
- 1968 and strikes in 1975 and 1983 turning point in relationship between migrants and trade unions in France
- 1980s and 1990s: civil society organizations and self organized groups became dominant in migrant struggles
- Tension between self organized migrant groups and trade unions
Illegalized Migrants in France

- Undocumented migrants main feature of neoliberal migration regime
- Official estimates state that 200 000 - 300 000 illegalized immigrants live in France
- Work in low paid jobs
- Mostly in construction, textile, hospitality, cleaning, personal assistance and care services
- Term *Sans Papiers*
„We live here, we work here and we will stay here“

- Cross sectorial strike of 6000 *Sans Papiers*[1]
- *Loi Hortefeux* opened up possibility of a strike for a legal residence and work permit
- Two main strike waves between 2008 – 2010: L’acte I and L’acte II
- Occupation of work places, strike pickets, "open strike“, strong media presence
- Employees in sectors that are traditionally weak in trade union organization and representation
- Dominant sectors: hospitality, temping (security), cleaning, construction
- Occupation of the *Place de la Bastille*
Occupation of the *Place de la Bastille*

**Figure:** *Sans Papiers* at the *Place de la Bastille* (Gègout, Phototheque)
The movement’s victories and contradictions

Shift in the discourse

*Sans Papiers* were perceived as workers

- Demonstrated that *Sans Papiers* are inherently part of society and not at the edge of society
- Effectiveness of a strike as a means of struggle for *Sans Papiers*
- Within the trade union movement and for *Sans Papiers* themselves
The movement’s victories and contradictions

New alliance

Coalition of eleven organizations, collectives and trade unions with different experiences and approaches to migrants struggles.

- Relative autonomy of different strike pickets
- Diverging experiences and outcomes
- First contact with trade unions, many new members
- The need to provide services to individuals (vs. efforts to mobilize workers in collective action)[4]
The movement’s victories and contradictions

Resulting tensions

Who is part of the strike and who is not?

- "Open strike" concept made it difficult to determine who was actually part of the strike and who was not
- Focused on work and work-related issues and did not directly address the migration regime
- You cannot share a residence and a work permit
- Tensions between autonomous collectives of Sans Papiers and trade union representation of Sans Papiers
Picket of transportation workers

Figure: Picket at tramway 2009 (Gègout, Phototheque)
Questions
Outlook

- Current migration regime in Europe in crisis
- Dominant form of migration is asylum migration
- France governing under a state of emergency
- Demolition of makeshift camp of migrants in Calais
- Relatively closed labor market for migrants and refugees
- The *Front National* gaining strength
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