

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

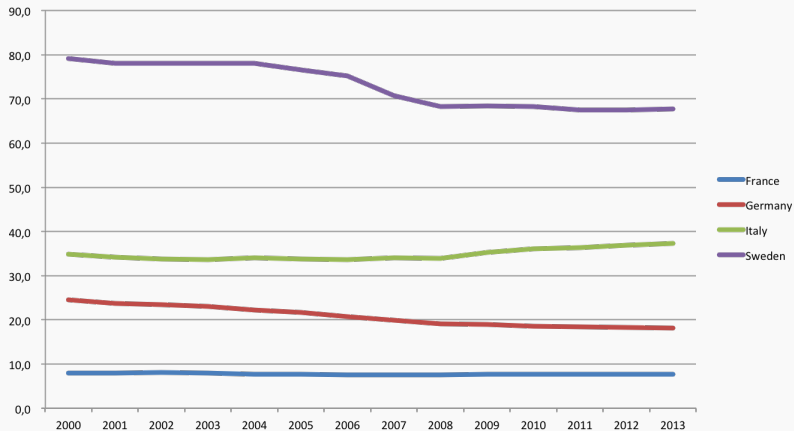


Figure: Trade Union Density Sweden, Italy, Germany and France (OECD)

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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