

# All refugees welcome



Over the past few weeks, the massive arrival of refugees in Belgium has been marked by a great wave of solidarity from the population. A 'town within the town' has been organized in the Maximilien Park. We want to salute the work of tens of people, volunteers, which participate in this initiative. Such solidarity is an example and without them, the situation of refugees in Belgium would be catastrophic.

Nevertheless, this refugees « drama » is far from solved and in fact, it is likely to get worse. The positions of EU leaders, including the Belgian government, do not bring significant solutions to the problem. On the contrary, one has to hear racist and xenophobic comments from politicians on a daily basis.

## **A structural problem of capitalism**

The number of displaced persons is rising; the most important wave of refugees since World War II. This is a direct result of global political and social instability, wars that European and US powers have waged all over the world. The situation in Iraq, Syria, Libya and in other African countries is the result of a colonialist policy of military intervention. The

masses of refugees arriving in Europe are fleeing these « military conflicts » that have been waged by the world's powerful.

Ending these migrations requires ending colonialist policies and actually supporting progressive and revolutionary forces who are struggling against occupation, dictatorship and the Islamic State.

But the only alternative proposed by the EU is more repression: it announced a « naval battle » against people smugglers. The EU 28 are using frigates and elite troops « trained for boarding ». They want to strengthen the bombing of Syria, while this response has proven inefficient against ISIS, and refuse to support resistant forces that fight against it. Several EU countries are closing their borders and barbed wire walls stand between Europe and other people.

Now that refugees are at the doors of fortress Europe, some are allowed to come inside, without taking into account the actual needs of all of them. All EU countries say they have reached maximum capacity. Meanwhile, governments are not setting aside additional budgets for infrastructure and personnel necessary to welcome others.

For example, in Belgium, at Fedasil, the federal

department in charge of asylum requests, workers have been struggling against the government for months. Several centres welcoming refugees have been closed in Wallonia during the past year – they are now re-opening, which highlights the lack of long-term strategy in managing such services and their quality. Privatization of catering or security only weakens these institutions.

The « generosity » of governments (for example, in Germany) is questionable when they claim they want to integrate refugees by offering them a job. Of course we agree these workers deserve a job, but not at any condition and wage. It is worrying to hear and read in the media how these refugees will take jobs at 1 euro in Germany and make the country more competitive, or statements by Fernand Huts, an executive at the Antwerp harbour, who claims he would hire 500 workers immediately if the federal government would bring changes to the social protection of the harbour's workers.

Indeed their objective, far from « helping » refugees, is to profit from their situation to pressure other workers. Employers' associations (FEB, Unizo, ...) mentioned their « interest » for certain refugees' profile, able to fulfill technical jobs where the available workforce is scarce. Unizo even opened a desk in the Maximilien Park so that refugees can register. They have quotas aiming at selecting among refugees the qualified workforce and rejecting others who are useless for employers.

### **Class solidarity**

We demand equal working conditions under Belgian law. No weakening of protections! Equal rights and social protection for all workers in Belgium!

Workers' unions must take a clear position in solidarity with refugees: offer a legal status to all asylum seekers and demand equal working conditions. To fight against austerity is also to fight against the over-exploitation imposed by employ-

ers. Recognition of their diplomas and trainings and the related wage, trainings for those who do not have any, to avoid that they become victims of bargaining over their wages!

The situation at the Maximilien Park is becoming critical. Cold weather is arriving and it is necessary to find alternatives for refugees. The citizens' platform, the federal government, the city of Brussels, the Red Cross and other institutions have gathered to discuss proposals for accommodation. Meanwhile, refugees were not represented to formulate their needs and requests.

Their own organisation and representation is important: building a tool that will unite refugees to face their difficulties; obtaining a legal status, a training and access to jobs, education and health. And immediately: organize to find a decent bed.

It is necessary to organize assemblies that can express their own solutions, elect their own representatives who take part in discussions and inform the others. We are not questioning the role of the citizens' platform: we simply think it's important that next to solidarity movements, refugees themselves can express their demands and ensure continuity to the movement.

The movement must also face the politics of criminalization from governments and politicians ; narratives that aim at dividing, by treating refugees as abusing the social protection system, by stating that « half of the Maximilien Park is made of homeless people without papers or extreme-left activists ». For that, it is necessary that refugees get organized, that they push their demands, that they meet Belgian workers, engage in local struggles and fight the ideology of employers.

For that reason we must engage together, workers from Belgium and elsewhere, in the demonstration of 7 October, to fight for better life conditions for all, against austerity and for solidarity with our class sisters and brothers the refugees.

<sup>1</sup>Le Soir 15/09/15 <sup>2</sup> Le Soir 21/09/15

**Solidarity with refugees! Stop their criminalization!**

**Equal rights for all! Here and elsewhere, we are all workers!**

**Open borders, papers for all!**



**Ligue Communiste des Travailleurs** (Communist Worker's League)

Belgian section of the International Worker's League -Fourth International (IWL-FI)

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