

No-No-No

June 1, 2011

For the activist who speaks of citizenship and human rights, it could be inconvenient to analyze the workings of the deportation machine through its links to the world which made it rather than by a series of emotional con-games and appeals to the logic of scandal. Because it will always be more comfortable to wave the spectre of “fascism on our doorstep” in order to be able to pose as saviours, than to give ourselves the means for a radical analysis of migration politics. First off, because it is always nicer when we look at ourselves in the social mirror to see reflected back the resistant heroism of the fighting republican. Also because to sway public opinion, that myth, is to shake straw bogey-men in an unsurpassable emotional discourse.

It is necessary to start by remembering that immigration does not mean only the act of staying in a foreign land. If immigration is generally a trend of displacement of the labour force from one region to another, or the flight from a country for fear of persecution or in the wake of ecological catastrophes, it is still a wandering search for a better life. But immigration is still linked, most of the time, to work, as much as the economy is intrinsically linked to the exploitation of a workforce, whether imported or local.

In order to travel or wander, it is necessary to secure certain guarantees, and this is what distinguishes migrants from tourists. It is for this reason in particular that immigration is not experienced as pleasant, unlike tourism. There is already a lot of duress in the need to work, here as elsewhere, and there is even more of it when you leave your friends and family to degrade yourself to the task, to go sacrifice your individual desires for a community or when you are forced to spend months and months hanging around under the control of humanitarian structures to finally obtain a (very) hypothetical residency permit.

Concretely, the exploitation of non-status people, whether it be in food services, the Department of Buildings and Public Works, textiles, seasonal agriculture, or elsewhere, keeps the global cost of labour down, as well as the standards and canons of its drudgery – those regulations so bizarrely flexible for those who do not have to suffer through it. Usually restricted to the poorest countries, or to certain sectors, the worst conditions of exploitation are expanding little by little to other categories of the exploited, as part of a wider trend of the material impoverishment of the population.

The logic of the deportation machine rises from a very democratic logic of the banal management of the economy. Lowering the cost of labour at the bottom is well understood to raise

revenue at the top. It is sometimes preferable to import the workforce than to relocate the workplaces for obvious reasons of productivity and profitability. And, if the business of immigration is not ready to stop flourishing, it's because, associated to the ideology of progress, the standardization of more and more miserable conditions of survival for each and everyone can only strengthen profits, the juice squeezed from each human lemon. For the happiness of the State, when he works, finds housing, eats and drinks, the immigrant finds himself taxed and assessed, like everyone. Money has no colour, as much as migrant politics are not properly speaking racist, but workerist and capitalist. It is also this lack of analysis that pushes some poor folk to envy each other in this scenario of veritable civil war which gains more ground each day.

To deconstruct this simplistic reasoning, on the questions of immigration as with others, is to deconstruct the politics which insinuates itself in our struggles by quantitative and artificial reports of awareness-raising which can only lead to a general impoverishment of analysis. It is to make a qualitative leap from politics to a revolt that is anti-authoritarian in outlook. The diverse movements around the question of immigration, whether their ideology is one of citizenship, human rights, or humanitarianism, by appealing to the tactic of the scandal under the pretext of arousing a sense of responsibility in the citizenry, only succeed in washing their hands of their responsibility for the role they play in the deportation machine. Those who exhorted us to Vote Chirac in 2002 to "blockade fascism" are the same who today complain of the laws enacted under his mandate, those who complain of the disastrous management of the CRAs¹ and of the system in its totality are the same ones who support the logic of their co-management, with CIMADE² leading the charge.

In a world which seems to be transforming itself more and more into a multitude of camps with diverse functions but of the same nature – whether they serve to hold the workforce in place (as in the case of refugee camps and slums) or to deport it (as in the case of the detainment camps) – it should also be possible, if the approach is that of critical and radical analysis of the deportation machine, to make an account of certain telling facts.

Laid bare, the process of expulsion can be simply summarized: a round-up allows the collection of a handful of undocumented persons. Of this handful, one part will be released who can return to the hum drum day-to-day of their exploitation, ever more fearful, knowing that fear has always had as an asset to domination its contagious nature, its tendency to spread itself wide and to allow the internalization of control in everyone in order to try to make coercion unnecessary: the achievement of democratic domination. "Keep yourself in line, next time you won't be so lucky" says the cop at the end of an "identity check". Another group will get thrown into a fucking detention centre and among these, some will be released right away to await the next round-up, the next identity check and the next forced internment, the banality of which will be proportional to its frequency. Others, about half, will indeed be deported.

Arresting a lot, imprisoning many, and deporting some serves to distill fear in everyone. The deportation machine, beyond "simple" deportation, seeks the domestication of the poorest workers, whether they are immigrants or not. It is this fear which is sought. On one hand, it reinforces the social peace and the incapacity of each person to re-appropriate their life for themselves, on

¹ The CRAs, or Centres de rétention administrative, are France's detention centres.

² CIMADE, or Comité Inter Mouvements Auprès Des Évacués, is a French non-profit which has worked with migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers since 1939. Since 1984, they have, with government approval, worked in the CRAs, and since June 2009 have been the only NGO permitted to enter them.

the other, it procures for the bosses a docile workforce. Combined with the blackmail of the necessity of work, fear is the fertilizer of slavery, of a new race of forced labour which gains ground day by day.

So we're quite far from the analyses of politicians and reformists tinted with 'catastrophism' and something of the fear-mongering which would see in this or that temporary State puppet a "new Pétain³", or in this or that new law "a racist agenda", as if democratic law and the legal system were not intrinsically discriminatory. There is in all of this a coherence and a realism of which citizenship and human-rights analyses cannot brag: This logic is that of capitalism and of law, of the society of domination and the mechanisms of oppression, all complimentary.

It will take much more than "No! No! No!", than giant photographs of unbearably cute children, than glorifications of the united family and other Hollywoodesque tear-jerkers to overcome the deportation machine, a first grain of sand to put into its inner workings could be a analysis of the roots of its mechanisms which, in place of the complaint and the whimper, will allow us to organise ourselves to rediscover offensive perspectives against all the assaults of domination, without forgetting on the way to destroy the deportation machine, its detention centres and every prison.

There will always be better things to burn than a vigil candle...

³ Philippe Pétain (1856–1951) was the leader of the government which surrendered to Nazi Germany in 1940. In that year he became the founder and head of the Vichy Regime until its fall in 1944. After the Allied repulsion of the Nazis from France, Pétain was convicted of high treason for his collaboration and sentenced to death, later commuted to life in prison by de Gaulle.

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