

**The Griallet case:
“I don’t thank the CGT, because *we* are the CGT”¹**

Case study prepared for the Labor Unions and Civic Integration of Immigrant Workers research project. September 2010. Written as a research contribution for the book *Mobilizing against Inequality: Unions, Immigrant Workers and the Crisis of Capitalism*, Lee Adler, Maite Tapia and Lowell Turner (eds.), Ithaca: ILR Press, 2014.

¹Data presented here has been collected over the summer 2010 from interviews with Griallet workers and with trade union officials and organizers in the city of Montreuil (in the suburban area of Paris). Some elements were also taken from a documentary film made by Joseph Mule of the CGT Montreuil, which goes back over the history of the Griallet struggle. The Union Locale CGT of Montreuil has also been kind enough to share various written documents that constituted the Griallet case at the time of the conflict: pamphlets, memos, letters and press releases. The interviewees were asked if they wished to be anonymized, but none of them wished so. They seem to have spoken openly and without restraint under their real names.

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The “Griallet” strike: a textbook case

A short history of the relationship between trade unions and “Sans papiers”

Trade unions have been present for a long time besides workers, and they have been rather successful in improving working conditions, social welfare or salaries for workers over decades. However, the relationship between trade unions and immigrant workers (whether documented or undocumented) are not so obvious.² Sébastien Chauvin, Nicolas Jounin and Lucie Tourette (2008) remind us that undocumented employees were considered by labor unions as full workers only at the beginning of 2000s. They talk about the new movement of undocumented immigrants (“the “sans-papiers” as they are called, the ones with no papers), which appears in the middle of the 90s and gives a voice to the undocumented workers who were until then deprived of it. But the demands of this movement are based on a human rights speech, and it is first and above all as citizens that they ask for their regularization. The authors specify: “the strikes are hunger strikes. They occupy churches and not companies. The leaders of the movement identify themselves as citizens of the world more than as employees. Their sources of income stay in the shadow and their employers are not addressed.” The role of labor unions is then very limited, because immigrant workers are not perceived as being an integral part of the working class:

“As for labour unions, they are only a support among others for what appears then as a civil rights movement, morally just but foreign to the world of the work. Although, in 1996, one thousand Chinese undocumented workers of the clothing and catering business become members of the CGT in Paris region, the unionization of the undocumented is not for the agenda. ‘Labour unions defended undocumented immigrants as deprived from residence permits and consequently deprived of rights, shows Emmanuel Terray, then actor of the movement. But for a while, maybe because of internal resistances, they hesitated to take care of the undocumented immigrants as workers.’ The idea to form a new labour union of the Parisian (clothing business, which would could have counted 3000 members, is repelled.” (Chauvin and al., 2008)

Violaine Carrère (2009), who is interested too in the 2008 undocumented workers' strike actions, insists on the evolution of labor unions' attitude towards striking undocumented workers. Indeed, she brings reports that at the beginning of the movements, the practices of solidarity with these workers came from individual initiatives rather than from collective actions:

“ Of course, union activists, belonging to the CGT, to the CFDT, to Solidaires, to the CNT, had supported undocumented workers for a long time already, held offices to advise them and defend them, lent rooms for their meetings. But it had especially been individual or local initiatives, which, if they were not denied at the level of confederacies, were not really carried by them. Especially, if during the last two decades, labour unions joined associations and parties supporting the fights of undocumented immigrants, they did it as actors of civil society among others, and not specifically as labor unions: it wasn't time for them to try and unionize these workers.”

² The following lines are taken from the literature review I realized in 2009, entitled “The role of French unions in the civic integration of immigrant workers”.

Now, according to Carrère, it is the “implication of labor unions in this movement which put back on stage the figure of the immigrant worker”. The author notes that while putting back the labor law to the heart of the demands of undocumented workers, the movement was able to weigh as it did; it is by means of the labor unions that undocumented workers discovered their rights as workers:

“The workgroup ‘Labour union/Non-status’, which began to meet in June, 2007, opts for the use of labour law as a weapon to advance the cause of undocumented immigrants, and decides to try to inform them widely of the rights they have as workers. In doing so, the workgroup wishes to improve the real place occupied in the economy by the great majority of undocumented immigrants, and to counter the image that is mostly given of them: a non-working population, victims of the mirages of a rich France, depending on the social welfare system. In the group, some of these union activists have a long time experience of the support for undocumented immigrants: members of SUD and the FSU, among which factory inspectors, a person in charge of the CNT-Nettoyage in Paris, and an activist of CGT, secretary of the local Union of the city of Massy (Essonne), which has been fighting for years on this front.”

Chauvin, Jounin and Tourette (2008) have a similar point of view when they evoke the formative dimension of the encounter between union activists and undocumented workers:

“The undocumented workers don’t emphasize their marginality but on the contrary their concrete integration to the working class, in its individual and collective dimensions. In this respect, for many of them the struggle is itself the opportunity to discover rights they already enjoyed in France as wage-earners, without always knowing it: the right to minimum wage, to a weekly time off, to redundancy payments, the right to demand unpaid salaries or to pursue their employer to the ‘Prud’hommes’ (a labor relations tribunal). The striking workers do not appear any more as ‘right-less’ but as employees who already have rights, and who, somehow, ask for ‘it all’”

Carrère explains how undocumented workers and the labor-union activists, within the workgroup ‘Labour union/Non-status’, produced a common tool, after fruitful exchanges around the concrete problems experienced by undocumented workers; this tool, entitled ‘4 pages’, is the product of meetings during which “undocumented immigrants make propositions, share their experiences, defend their points of view. They speak about consequences of the situation of irregular stay on their relations with employers: the fear to go to work and to be afraid all the time of being arrested, the order given by the bosses to hide during controls of the factory inspectorate or the URSAFF, the rough dismissals, the unpaid wages, the work accident that leaves without resources, etc.” This short document, intended to undocumented workers themselves, expresses “the list of their workers’ rights” and invites them “to seek help from labor unions representatives for the defense of their rights” and naturally to form a labor union. According to Carrère, the 2008 strike actions produced a strong political link between labor unions and undocumented workers, and thus constitute a turning point in the history of the working class struggles in France:

“The undocumented workers movement of April, 2008 revives in a way the big fights led by labour unions with the immigrants of the 70s and of the beginning of the 1980s. It constitutes a tremendous revolution with regard to the next decades in the course of which labour unions hardly mobilized with undocumented immigrants. It put back on stage the figure of the immigrant worker, so much erased that French people ignored that most of the undocumented immigrants work, and that many pay contributions at the cash desks of social welfare and pay taxes.” (Carrère, 2009)

As for him, Nicolas Jounin (2008), in its work on the construction workers, shows less optimism and enthusiasm than Carrère. The sociologist, who dived into the world of construction during several months,

tells with a lot of sharpness how the social and ethnic division of labor materializes itself on construction sites, where a majority of workers are immigrants. He says: “on other construction sites, I have heard never really about labor unions, even less seen labor-union visits” (154). If the workers are aware that their working conditions can depend on a possible unionization (130), their attitude towards labor unions and union representatives is ambivalent, for objective reasons: the “explosion of the working class collective” (196), because employers resort more and more to subcontracting and to temporary work, stresses the hierarchical organization of workers according to their status (temporary workers, employees, subcontracted, on the black market, etc.) and prevents any form of collective action. In the current industrial landscape, union activists seem to not have measured this explosion and the study of Jounin shows a very strong solitude of immigrant workers as victims of multiple oppressions.

The 2008 strikes of undocumented workers provide an interesting angle of approach to understand the relationships between labor unions and immigrant workers, and the concrete possibilities of common action. The undocumented workers are a small part of immigrant and foreign workers, but they crystallize a certain number of political issues such as immigration policies, the definition of the nation, employment law and working class struggles. In this context, the CGT appears to be at the frontline of the struggles, and maintains a continued presence on the striking immigrant workers sides. The CGT, that is the Confédération Générale du Travail (General Confederation of Labour), was founded in 1895 from the merge of the Fédération des Bourses du Travail (Federation of Labour Councils). It is a national trade union center and the first of the five major French confederations of trade unions in France. It is the largest in terms of votes (32.1% at the 2002 professional election, 34.0% in the 2008 election), and second largest in terms of membership numbers. Its membership decreased to 650,000 members in 1995-96 (it had more than doubled when François Mitterrand was elected President in 1981), before increasing today to between 700,000 and 720,000 members.

The context: the CGT campaign supporting the « sans papiers »

The context in which the movement of occupation of the company Griallet started is essential to understand its dynamics and its issues. January 7th, 2008, Brice Hortefeux, the Minister of Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Co-development, passes a circular which stipulates that a device of regularization of certain immigrant workers will be set up concerning a list of jobs by region (attached in appendix to the circular). It is added that the requests connected to a job which, “without appearing in the regional list, undergoes particularly high difficulties of recruitment in the labor pool” can also be the object of an examination. It is in this context that the CGT decides to step into this breach in the French law to launch a campaign of regularization that is expected to be massive. As Marion Quintin (2009) explains, this campaign “led in tandem by CGT and Sans-Papiers is a first-line movement” which started off quite spectacularly with the takeover of about ten firms by about two hundreds undocumented immigrant workers in 5 departments of the province Ile de France. As of today, the campaign still goes on: on the 3rd of august, 2010, more than 500 regularization requests were submitted to the prefecture of Paris by the

CGT, all of them coming from undocumented workers. Two months earlier, on June 18th, 2010, and after 8 months of undocumented workers strike, the Government made public a text containing significant headways corresponding to the objectives fixed by the Unitarian letter (CGT, CFDT, FSU, UNSA, Solidaires, Ligue des droits de l'Homme, Cimade, Autremonde, Femmes Egalité, RESF, Droits Devant) sent on October 1st, 2009 to the Prime Minister. This text guaranteed in particular objective, uniform, valid criteria of regularization whatever the company and the department, as well as the equal treatment between the employees. As to the procedure of regularization, records supported by labor unions must, according to this text, be filed at the Labor direction of the workplace of the applicants. Finally, according to this text, the strikers, who by their determination had allowed these progresses, were recognized the right to stay and to work until their record was filed according to the letter of June 24th, 2010 (N 340) signed by the Director of Immigration.

Although the promises of this text were not held by the government, and although the actual results (in particular the number of regularizations) are not so striking, the campaign led by CGT in association with other associations maintains a high level of mobilization, and it has been going on for more than two years. The mobilization of the Griallet employees is not actively explicitly part of this campaign, or at least they did not get organized in a coordinated way with the other strikes. However, the Griallet conflict obviously is in keeping with the wave of strikes which hit the country in the year 2008, and benefited from the tense context of undocumented immigrant fights and from the unusual media hype surrounding this campaign (as we shall see further in the analysis).

The Griallet case : the facts

The family company, the head office of which is situated in La Ferté-Milon (in Aisne, Picardy region), is managed by Jean-Luc Griallet. He is helped by his brother Stéphane and by Stéphane's wife Corinne (who will become afterward the manager of the new company that Jean-Luc Griallet created during the strike), as well as his daughter Emilie. It is a demolition, excavation, and cleaning company, belonging to the BTP sector (Bâtiment Travaux Publics – Building and Civil engineering works), whose office is situated at the 3bis, rue des Batteries, in a working class neighborhood of the city of Montreuil, in the department of Seine-Saint-Denis. The city of Montreuil is characterized in particular by a relatively high poverty – the unemployment rate in 2006 is 17.9 % – and a strong proportion of Malian inhabitants, which represent approximately 10 % of the city population. Although the city is in a process of gentrification, its working class and multicultural identity remains intact: the city has a long history of workers' struggles and is very clearly anchored to the left with Dominique Voynet (Verts – environmentalist party) as the mayor since the municipal elections of March, 2008. She succeeded to a period of 24 years during which it is Jean-Pierre Brard (PCF – French communist party) who managed the city.

The practices of the Griallet Company against their employees “sans papiers” are regrettably rather standard and clearly illustrate the fact that these bosses have an objective interest to employ undocumented immigrants. They know that they will be open to ruthless exploitation, little claiming and very easy to replace (Chauvin, 2008). Indeed, this is what Flimadi Traoré, one of the strikers, explains when he recalls Jean-Luc Griallet’s comments whenever one of his employees began to claim: “There are many Mamadou waiting for a job at the hostel”. According to Flimadi, this means that “if it isn’t you, it’s another ‘sans papiers’, that’s all!” Indeed, the racist use of the name Mamadou to designate any black worker shows how interchangeable these workers are to the eyes of Jean-Luc Griallet. Flimadi Traoré adds that the offices of BTP companies are frequently situated close to immigrant workers’ hostels, so offering to the employers a stock of cheap and immediately available workers. Very well informed of the situation of his employees towards the law, Jean-Luc Griallet is guilty of numerous undocumented labor practices. He does not hesitate to invent names to his employees to establish false pay slips, does not pay neither the paid leaves, nor the sick leaves, and even less the overtime hours. His workers have to work in pitiful conditions, and Griallet refuses to provide them with an equipment of protection such as masks against the dust or gloves to protect their hands from the toxic products. The employees are exposed to lead and to asbestos, and he refuses to establish medical certificates testifying of this exposure. This « gangster boss », as he will be named during the strike by all the actors of the movement, frequently shows off his racist convictions, and proudly tells his employees that he would rather “close the business than give one euro to a Black”.

In spite of the obvious abuses of this business manager who took advantage of the precariousness of the status of his employees, numerous employees have been working for him for quite a long time – 8 to 10 years for some, and “accept the unacceptable”. Nevertheless, under the constant pressure of Josselyn Loubli, a French West Indian worker who is also staff representative and a member of the CGT, the employees “sans papiers” will finally agree to make a collective request to their boss. At the beginning of May 2008, the CGT section of Griallet, represented by Josselyn Loubli, and the Local Union of CGT Montreuil, represented by Richard Delumbee, send a mail to Jean-Luc Griallet. They demand that Jean-Luc Griallet take all the necessary steps with the prefecture, within the framework of the circular Hortefeux on “in tension jobs”, to obtain the regularization of 19 undocumented workers of his company (out of 21 or 22), the hand over for each of the workers of the certificates of exposure to asbestos and lead, and the payment of overtime hours and untaken paid leaves. The answer of the BTP company manager is to send a letter dated May 21st to each of his employees (including two French employees), which claims that, having discovered the irregular situation of his staff and not knowing “which attitude to adopt”, Jean-Luc Griallet is forced to suspend the employment contracts of the employees. The same day, he and his brother go on each of the construction sites where his employees are working to summon these to leave. The manager specifies to his employees that he will get in touch with them within 2 days or ... 2 months! The following morning, 21 workers – along with Richard Delumbee – appear at the company office situated 3bis Street of Batteries in Montreuil. But the secretary, Jean-Luc Griallet’s sister-in-law, refuses to open the doors of the company to them. In the afternoon, Jean-Luc Griallet finally arrives on the scene where the employees and the union official are still waiting for him, and agrees to receive Richard

Delumbee only to inform him that he will not grant the demands of the employees. That is when they decide to occupy the premises; in spite of the threats Jean-Luc Griallet and his sister-in-law address them. These two will even go as far as fetching their dogs, and threatening to release the wildest of them on the protesters. The “Griallet” mobilization begins this same day.

From May 22nd, 21 workers - among which 19 undocumented immigrants - will occupy the office of the company 3bis Street of Batteries, despite the fact that Jean-Luc Griallet cut the water inlet, and blocked the access to the toilets which were outdoor on the site. In order to continue his business, he turns to temporary workers. The strikers will be twice assigned to the TGI (Tribunal de Grande Instance – equivalent of a Crown Court) of Bobigny by Jean-Luc Griallet, and the judge who dismisses Griallet’s suit the first time is inexplicably going to grant his request the second time: at the beginning of September, the strikers will be expelled from the premises of the Griallet company, and will have to make do with the public highway where they will settle their temporary camp. From September 4th till December 15th, 2008, it is outside, in the dead end in front of their company, that they will sleep, eat, and receive neighbors, elected officials, labor-unionists and members of various associations, in appalling camping conditions. Throughout 7 months of occupation, they will keep up with the same three demands: the payment of their salaries and paid leaves, certificates proving the exposure of the employees to asbestos and to lead, and for the 19 undocumented workers, the regularization process to be started with the prefecture. Jean-Luc Griallet will hide during a good part of these 7 months, but the strikers will finally win because, on September 19th, the commercial court of Soissons states the closing down of Jean-Luc Griallet’s company. The CGT and the strikers then turn to the liquidator and the CAPEB (Confédération de l’Artisanat et des Petites Entreprises du Bâtiment - Confederacy of crafts and small building sector business sector), which is the union that advises Jean-Luc Griallet since the beginning of the conflict. They require to those that their three demands be heard. December 15th, Richard Delumbee announces the end of the conflict by a press release with an explicit title: “Griallet: 7 months of heroic fight, and in the end: the victory!” The employees of Griallet “obtained the recognition of their professional exposure to lead and to asbestos” “are going to receive [...] their entire salary from May 22nd until today” and “have an appointment next Wednesday at the prefecture at 3 pm to come and get their first residence permit delivered by the Republic, authorizing them to work again”.

The role of the CGT in the Griallet strike

The Griallet case is exemplary of the way in which the participation of labor unions such as the CGT can turn out decisive in the undocumented workers’ fights. But what is even more important, this case demonstrates that while appropriating a certain labor-union identity, the undocumented workers of Griallet led their fight not only *beside* labor-union activists, but *as* labor-union activists themselves. To what extend did the collaboration of the CGT in the Griallet conflict participate in the satisfaction of the demands of the undocumented workers? But especially, to what extend did the labor-union (here the CGT) collective practices of mobilization were appropriated by the “sans papiers” strikers, and left its marks on

their personal, professional and political trajectory and as citizen? The following analysis has the objective to define the contribution of CGT in the Griallet conflict, and its role – beyond the “simple” success of the fight – in the social integration of the “sans papiers” workers. This role and the various manners through which it was embodied can be read in the light of several tools of the sociology of social movements.

The trade union as a “conscience constituent”

According to the theory of the mobilization of resources, developed in the United States in particular by John D. Mac Carthy and Mayer N. Zald (1977), any social movement is *potentially* mobilized; it is the role of the SMO (Social Movements Organizations) to set in motion the protest energies and to supply with these resources of which they are often deprived. Thus, Mac Carthy and Zald built a typology of the possible supports for a social movement, for example members and active members (“constituents”). Inside this category of constituents, the authors distinguish two types of activists: the “potential beneficiaries” are those who are directly affected by the oppression they are fighting against; others, designated as “conscience constituents”, support the organization without getting a material profit from it. These conscience constituents play the role of organizers and spokespersons of the social movement, while bringing from the outside know-how, networks, logistics that such latent group – because of being too annihilated, culturally disarmed, stigmatized - does not succeed in building from its own resources (Neveu, 2005: 53). It seems to us that this analysis can be very relevant in the case that interests us, that of the “sans papiers” workers of the Griallet company. Indeed, it is not uninteresting to reflect on the CGT in the light of the ideal-type developed by the theory of the mobilization of resources. Indeed, the resources mobilized by CGT throughout the conflict are numerous and varied. They widen the collective action répertoire (Tilly, 1986) to which the “sans papiers” alone would have had access. We shall consider four of them:

1) Material resources

These material resources are crucial; they are as diverse as the premises given to the workers on strike for their public meetings for example (the Maison de l’arbre, the Maison Ouverte, the cinema Georges Méliès, the village hall of the city hall), the logistics which allowed to collect of more than 12 000€ in support for the fight, or even the mobile phones which were lent by activists to the strikers. Finally, the CGT is materially omnipresent in the conflict, for example via their propaganda material. Indeed, the movie realized by a CGT activist shows particularly clearly this material dimension of the CGT to the Griallet conflict: the spaces of the occupation are saturated by stickers, flags, posters representing the CGT effigy. Red and white colors inevitably attract the eye, and neither the strikers, nor the occasional visitors can escape this symbolic and material presence of the CGT on the premises of the conflict.

2) Network resources

Network resources concern, for the Griallet case in particular, the mobilization of local political personalities who know the labor-union activists with whom they have regular and often cordial contacts. The mayor of Montreuil, Dominique Voynet, and the previous mayor – today Montreuil deputy – Jean-Pierre Brard, were very present beside the strikers. We can suppose that the CGT played the role of an intermediary between the “sans papiers” workers and these political officials, whose role in the increased media focus on and the politicization of this conflict were rather important. For example, on October 8th, 2008, Jean-Pierre Brard invited the Griallet strikers at the National Assembly so that they could attend his press conference. It was the occasion for him to explain their case as well as that of the employees of the Sanir PLMT company, from the city of Pavillon-Sous-Bois, occupied since July 15th, 2008.

3) Media resources

The media have become full actors of the social movements, although they are mostly ambivalent: Erik Neveu qualifies the relation that the media maintain with the social movements as of partners – rivals in an ambiguous relation (Neveu, 2005: 105). In this context, the role of labor unions is fundamental because they have a well-trained practice of the media tools and know how to mobilize them in their sense. It seems that the Griallet conflict was very well led in terms of media communication: articles were published in national newspapers such as *L'Humanité* and *Le Monde*, and local newspapers such as *Le Parisien*. A TV report was broadcasted on the Arte channel, and the conflict was on the headlines of the 8 o'clock TV news on the TF1 channel. The media coverage of the conflict can be considered as relatively exceptional, considering the silence that generally surrounds industrial disputes, except for some rare and spectacular events. Flimadi Traoré confirms: “from the day it was mediatized [from September, nfa], it helped us a lot.”

4) “Know how” resources

These “know how” resources imply a certain transmission of militant practices from labor-union activists towards the strikers. If some “sans papiers” may have already been militant themselves, the conflict with Jean-Luc Griallet was – for those we interviewed – their first political experience. Yacouba Kassogue, for example, had never participated in a collective action of this scale before this one, and admits that he learnt a lot from this experience. It allowed him to gain in self-confidence, and it allowed him to use this newly learnt know-how in other contexts, such as his new job, although the working conditions there have nothing to do with those at Jean-Luc Griallet's. In the same spirit, Flimadi Traoré, the second interviewee, remembers his attitude of withdrawal during the first public appearances, and is proud “of having learnt to speak in public” and “to face cameras”. He will be the one, for example, to write and pronounce the magnificent speech of celebration of the end of the conflict.

These resources were objectively out of reach for these “sans papiers” workers, because they are structurally deprived of any social, cultural or economic capital as Pierre Bourdieu (1984) would have said. Indeed, the undocumented immigrants are in such a heavy material and social precariousness, are

exploited by their bosses when they have a job and in a state of permanent fear that their situation is revealed and that they will be deported to their country of origin. If the risks are objectively high, what is even higher is the fear and feeling of insecurity that “sans papiers” have to endure. The subjective dimension of their precariousness is very important to consider: the fear of being revealed prevents them from rebelling against their situation. Flimadi Traoré insists on the fact that as a “sans-papier”, “you have no right to talk”. The documentary shows Josselyn Loubli, the staff representative (of French West Indian origin, thus French) who shares his incomprehension with Flimadi Traoré towards what he considers as some kind of servility from the part of his colleagues. He tries to convince Flimadi in an interesting dialogue:

“Come on, there are laws!

- Yes, there are laws, but not for poor people like us...

- Of, course, if you keep silent! You can't start off with a defeatist attitude ...”

Josselyn Loubli finds it hard to understand that the “sans papers” workers have put up such a long time with a situation that he considers unbearable; but it seems that his colleagues in an irregular situation considered that the costs connected to a potential resistance were heavier than their potential advantages. The Olson paradox, according to which it is more profitable to watch the others getting mobilized than to get mobilize oneself – and thus to act as a free rider – probably results, for the “sans papiers”, from this rational calculation between costs and advantages. However, the presence of conscience constituents such as the CGT can reverse the situation, as Erik Neveu suggested it: “The injection of militant or financial resources for the benefit of a cause, which these conscience constituents allow, brings a new empirical answer to the paradox of Olson. These outside resources make the costs of the collective action drop for the directly concerned groups and they enhance the outcomes of their efforts” (2005:52). The CGT, by supplying the “sans papiers” workers with a certain number of material and symbolic resources, thus probably participated in the movement getting set in motion. Maybe did the “sans papiers” group need this to go from a mobilizable group to a mobilized group (Bourdieu, 1984)? The notion of conscience constituents raises the problem of power and instrumentalization, as Quintin suggested it: “CGT decided to take the lead alone and to implement its own strategy while ignoring the fact that for many actors of the movement this strategy was questionable.” (2009: 14). But it allows us to think in a fertile way of the collaboration between labor unions and immigrant “sans papiers” workers.

The trade union as an agent of socialization

The strikers whom we interviewed acknowledge that they have changed between the beginning of the conflict and its end; not only their legal situation was stabilized, thanks to the residence permit they obtained from the prefecture, but also as far as their integration³ in the French society is concerned. Indeed, the conflict – and probably also the very active participation of the CGT in this conflict – seems to have been a vector of effective inclusion of the “sans papiers” workers who by definition were deprived of

³ The term of “integration” being very strongly connoted in France in the field of the sociology of the immigration, we shall prefer that of inclusion, or even that of socialization. (cf. “The role of French unions in the civic integration of immigrant workers: a literature review”, Dechaufour, 2009).

every right, including that of participating to the social life of the country in which they lived. In this sense, we can suppose that as an important social institution in today's society, labor unions operate as an agent of secondary socialization, defined by Berger and Luckmann "as the interiorization of institutional specialized sub-worlds" and "the acquisition of specific knowledge and roles directly or indirectly rooted in the division of labor"⁴ (1986 : 189). Socialization is the dynamic process by which an individual integrates the norms, values and beliefs of a society or a community; its mechanisms run from the society towards the individual, but the individual also appropriates the contents of the socialization and adapt them to his or her own life story. If, according to Berger and Luckmann, the secondary socialization takes place essentially in the professional sphere, we can widen this last one to the industrial disputes which are henceforth fully part – although "indirectly" – of the work sphere. Thus, labor unions are a space that can organize a certain socialization of their members, in spaces so diverse as Labor Exchanges ("Bourses du Travail", where trade unions usually have their offices), demonstrations or local offices on working sites (as "Comités d'entreprise"⁵). In the case of the Griallet conflict, our interviews have shown that the occupation premises have been a space where a certain social, political and citizen socialization was organized. But can we go as far as to say that the CGT participated in the "integration" of the "sans papiers"?

1) A professional socialization

According to the information collected from Richard Delumbee, the representative of Local Union of the CGT Montreuil, and from two employees of Griallet, each of the 21 strikers found a new job after the conflict. Their permanent presence on the occupation scene may have facilitated the encounter with local companies, and the hiring promises – necessary in order to obtain the residence permit – were numerous, although they were not followed by effect. It is difficult to measure the role of the CGT in the successful reintegration of the former Griallet workers on the labor market, given the particular characteristics of the BTP sector in France. But we have reasons to believe that the "sans papiers" workers were able "to take advantage" of their temporary visibility to acquire informal techniques of canvassing, contacting potential employers, or "networking". Besides, the conflict doubtlessly gave them important tools in terms of labor law, which strengthened their position in the necessarily uneven relations that exist between them and their employers – including when it is a question of convincing these to hire them. Moreover, we can assume that the conflict has strengthened the professional identity of the "sans papiers", so replacing the stigma associated with this identification (Brubaker, 2001). Richard Delumbee claims, "this fight was a class conflict, and not an immigrants". It is indeed the general position of the CGT, which insists on the class dimension rather than on the race dimension of the conflicts which oppose "gangster employers" to "sans papiers" workers. We postulate – but this would deserve to be looked at more thoroughly – that this analysis of the CGT participated in strengthening a feeling of class conscience connected to their belonging to the BTP sector mostly.

⁴ My translation.

⁵ A representative body of workers and management, required by law in any business with more than 50 employees, and entitled to an annual report from the owners, and consultation on all proposed changes. The "comité d'entreprise" also organizes social activities and holiday packages and arranges discount prices on selected goods and services.

2) A citizenship socialization

We understand the word « citizen » as defining a feeling of belonging to a community, the sentiment to be part of a group in which one is legitimate, and equal to the others. It seemed striking to us to notice that the strike was allowed to break a barrier that the assigned status of “sans papiers” had built up between them and the rest of the population - the French population, the one with papers. Flimadi Traoré explains it very well: “France gave us a name: the ‘sans papiers’”. This identification, this name given from outside, is a well-known characteristic power structures because the dominant is always the one who gets to define the dominated. This creates a border between a “them” and a “us” which maintains distrust, fear and even contempt, on both sides. Now, the interviews we conducted converge to the same conclusion: the strike and the numerous supporters who joined the fight participated in changing the vision that the Griallet workers had of French people. Yacouba Kassogue for example realized that some French people could show “solidarity and attachment”. An activist of the CGT, Swen P., was particularly present beside the ex-employees of Griallet, and Flimadi Traoré remembers that “[w]ith him, we forgot that we were on strike”. Finally, the conflict and its happy outcome allowed some workers to leave the immigrant workers’ hostel to rent a studio or an apartment. The question of accommodation is central: the absence of accommodation is often synonymic of social exclusion and the assignment of the “sans papiers” in the immigrant workers hostels such as the Sonacotra homes is another stigmatization in the life of “sans papiers” (Hmed, 2007). Indeed, Flimadi Traoré was able to rent a studio: “I feel at home”. Thus, it seems that “sans papiers” went from a second zone citizens status to that of full citizens, and this even before December 15th, when the prefecture handed them a residence permit. This process was progressive, and took place not exclusively on the ground of the law, but also on the ground of social relationships: the active support of the CGT activists and the collective and coordinated actions are probably participated to this citizenship socialization.

3) A political socialization

This socialization is an extension of the previous one; indeed, from the citizen to the political actor, there is only one step. Today, all former Griallet workers are members of the CGT. Although Yacouba admits he is not an active member, he specifies all the same: “I pay my contribution every month!” In the same manner, Flimadi Traoré, during the speech which celebrates the end of the conflict, claims its membership to the CGT; having thanked a certain number of persons, he adds: “some people are going to say: ‘you forget the CGT!’ No, we do not forget the CGT; today we are all members of the CGT! We are the CGT.” The contacts between the former strikers and the CGT activists of Montreuil are regular, and some participate when they can in the actions of support to other “sans papiers” strikes, such as that of Manpower, in Montreuil, right in front of the “Bourse du travail” where the office of the Local Union of the CGT Montreuil is settled. The CGT played an obvious role as an agent of political socialization. This trade union conveys a certain ideology: one of its main objectives is to recruit members in the working class and to widely spread its vision of work, of class struggle and of the capitalist system. Flimadi Traoré comes

back to his experience and declares that from now on he will refuse the oppression of a boss: “it is necessary to say that we were stupid to accept this kinds of condition. What is done is done, well, if I was asked to do it again, I would prefer to go back home rather than to work in the same conditions.” It is not possible for us to determine if the political consciousness of Flimadi was born or simply asserted itself during the conflict, or if he was politically conscious before. But we can suppose that through their collective fight in cooperation with the CGT, they developed a certain idea of political action and thought. Thus, the CGT most probably participated in the political socialization of the Griallet ex-workers.

The limits of the CGT role in the Griallet conflict

If the Griallet case is an example of a fertile collaboration between the “sans papiers” workers and the CGT – in particular thanks to the happy resolution of the conflict, it would be preposterous to make an ideal case out of it which would prove how much the “sans papiers” workers have to gain to work together with labor unions. Indeed, not only our investigation – reduced in time and in the number of interviews – did not allow us to go in depth into the details of the case; but furthermore, certain limits very quickly imposed upon us, concerning the power relations at a micro-sociological scale between the “sans papiers” immigrants and the activists, as well as the difficult junction between the interests of labor unions and those of “sans papiers”.

The reproduction of race power relations in the activist labor division

The position of CGT, as Richard Delumbee, representative of the Local Union of the CGT Montreuil, asserted it during our interview, is that undocumented immigrant's strikes are industrial disputes above all. This refers to the long history of class war, which is traditionally the key analysis of the CGT. So, according to Richard Delumbee, it is not Blacks but precarious workers who are exploited. Of course, this analysis is in confrontation with other analysis such as postcolonial theories for example, which recommend to come back in a constructive way to the colonial history of France, in order to reveal the continuities and the ruptures in the present economic and social structures, in particular on the labor market (Said, 1980; Boubeker and Hajjat, 2008). Actually, the majority of the immigrants who arrive in France in an irregular way come from countries formerly colonized by France. Indeed, Flimadi Traoré adopts quite a different point of view from that of Richard Delumbee's when he declares: “We cannot speak about Griallet without speaking about racism.” According to the exchanges we had with him, we can say that to his point of view, racism is more than insults such as those uttered by Jean-Luc Griallet or such as the refusals of his niece to shake hands with black employees, but refers to a global system which made him migrate from Mali to France and which exploits his work force as a formerly colonized person... He talked a lot about his migration during the interview, and makes a very direct link between the emigration process and the immigration process (Sayad, 1999). Thus, the position of the CGT on this subject may explain why race power relations, which are at the heart of the interpersonal practices, are

little questioned, at least from what we observed. However, the framework of what certain sociologists call the militant labor division (Nicourd, 2009; Dunezat, 2008) gives us useful tools to analyze them.

The militant labor division implies that militancy is a work, organized in a differentiated and hierarchical way according to the rules of the actual power relations; if the sexual division of militant work has already been the subject of very interesting and recent works, the racial (or ethnic) division of militant work is, from what we know, only little informed. Nevertheless, there would be there a major reflection to be led around conflicts such as the Griallet conflict. Indeed, the organization of the militant work during the Griallet strike is an example of the way in which power relations are reproduced at the very moment they are fought in other ways. The most striking example results from the documentary movie from which we took a certain number of elements for our analysis. A sequence of this movie happens on the occupation scene, as a public assembly was organized and gathered about fifty persons. The assembly is supposed to be festive, and hot dogs are handed out, as well as drinks. However, it is striking to notice that “sans papiers” - in other words undocumented people - are behind stoves, cooking sausages on the barbecue and serving Coca-Cola and fruit juice. The visitors, apparently militant for the greater part, maybe members of the CGT for some, stand on the other side of the stoves, and talk about politics such as the latest moves of the government. The camera slowly sweeps the space of the street of Batteries, and the sequence lasts long enough so that the viewer has time to hear the conversations of each of the groups. The dominated ones are given the material, socially unvalued tasks, such as cooking and serving; the dominant ones are given the prestigious, highly valued tasks, such as public speaking public (Richard Delumbee will speak in public to thank the participants and give an update of the conflict) or debates of ideas. This configuration is found again in the last sequence of the movie, while the activists celebrate the end of the conflict at the Maison de l’arbre, a well-known auditorium for Montreuil activists. This time, black women (probably the strikers’ wives) prepare and serve the food and drink. Certainly, this configuration is not consciously orchestrated, and validates the strong incorporation of class, sex and race *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1981). However, the movie ends with the public speech of Flimadi Traoré, so testifying of the possible reversal of the militant labor division and of the power structures that underlie it.

Josselyn Loubli: an efficient link between “sans papiers” and the CGT

Another limits which appeared to us comes from the fundamental role which played an individual in particular: Josselyn Loubli. This French West Indian staff representative, member of the CGT, played a major role mobilizing his « sans papiers » colleagues, because of his quite particular position at the crossroads of race power relations and political action. Indeed, Josselyn Loubli was the only one, according to our sources, to be unionized in the Griallet company. But he also was the only one to have his papers, because he was born French. As a Black worker, he also suffers from the racist insults of the management, but his delegate status makes him “an untouchable” according to Flimadi Traoré’s words. His connections with the CGT and its regular status make him less vulnerable and thus more vindictive; he is the one who will motivate the others to send a letter to Jean-Luc Griallet asking him to proceed to their

regularization with the prefecture (as planned by the Hortefeux circular), and he also was the one who decided the group to go on strike and to maintain a high level of mobilization during seven months. According to Josselyn Loubli himself, Jean-Luc Griallet blames him, as a CGT member, for the conflict: “With the CGT, including me, because he doesn’t want to see me, I am the problem; I am the one who has planned it all, like he says!” Some people such as Flimadi Traoré now admit that they did not trust Josselyn Loubli, who was kept out of the group of the “sans papiers”, and little informed about what they endured as such. In the movie, Josselyn Loubli admits, about a “sans papier” employee who returned bankrupt to his country of origin, because of Jean-Luc Griallet’s indifference: “I did not know all this!” Flimadi Traoré admits: “we could not trust Josselyn Loubli, even though he was the staff representative! He was the only one with papers!” These comments verify what Nicolas Jounin (2008) had noticed in his investigation about the distrust that union representatives inspire to “sans papiers” workers. They are more considered as threats for their security than as potential allies, and are thus kept at a distance of the “sans papiers” realities. And yet, Josselyn Loubli knew how to federate around him the Griallet employees, and we assume that his position in the race power relations enabled him to build a bridge between the world of “sans papiers” and that of the CGT. Racialized just like his colleagues, he is assigned to the “sans papiers” group because he too receives a letter dismissing him for the motive that his situation was irregular ... Christine Delphy (1998) notably showed that the dominated were victims of an essentialization process on the part of the dominant group; the individual dissolves him/herself in the group, which exists only as a group, while the dominants have the privilege of individuality and variety. Then, the members of the dominated group are considered as completely interchangeable. Each of them is identical to the others. So, Josselyn Loubli’s position in the social space of the company was without doubt an influential element in the conflict, in particular in the relationship that “sans papiers” could build with the CGT. The role of the CGT in the conflict might have been very different, had Josselyn Loubli not embodied this bridge. This is why we consider that the role of the CGT has limits.

Conclusion

The interviews conducted for this case study, as well as the access to a number of important documents, in particular a movie realized by an CGT activist, enabled us to get a glimpse on the role labor unions such as the CGT can play in the “integration” of migrant workers in France. They also bring to light limits, of which it is necessary to measure and to recognize the impact. However, they remain insufficient and call for in-depth studies. Moreover, the action of the CGT - their strategy, their real or hidden objectives, their practices - are questionable and disputed, in particular by organized in an autonomous way “sans papiers” as those who have been occupying for more than one year a former CPAM⁶ of the 18th district of Paris, renamed “Ministry of the Regularization of All the ‘Sans Papiers’”. This coordination of associations organized in May, 2010 a walk from Paris to Nice (in the south of France), which seems to have been completely boycotted by the CGT. Thus, the complex reality of power relations which exist between labor

⁶ Caisse Primaire d’Assurance Maladie - Local Social Security Office.

unions associations and associations (of “sans papiers” or of support to “sans papiers”), but also inside labor unions themselves because they bring together extremely heterogeneous members, makes it necessary to lead a more detailed investigation. However, we have to admit that the collaboration of the ex-Griallet and the Local Union of CGT MONTREUIL was a real success and produced a strong and long-lasting relationship between them. Thereby, this cooperation participated to the recognition as citizens of about twenty workers.

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