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Newspaper of discussion and news about migrants struggles

# مرحبا

# #4

2016 february 13



# No to Jail-Shelters

## **TUESDAY, 4 AUGUST, OCCUPATION OF THE EMMAÜS SOLIDARITÉ SHELTER IN JOINVILLE-LE-PONT**

**august 4  
2015**

**Joinville-  
le-Pont**

On Tuesday, 4 August, the migrants housed in the shelter run by Emmaüs on the premises of the Vincennes detention center demonstrated in protest over the slow administrative procedures and their living conditions. They padlocked the doors early in the morning, preventing Emmaüs staff from entering the building and screened all entrances. Those were their demands:

Our conditions for letting Emmaüs staff get back to work are:

1. Faster procedures: for those without domiciliation, a domiciliation within 10 days (before 14 August 2015).
2. That the director of Emmaüs accompanies the GIP (public interest grouping)\* on 6 August 2015.
3. Travel tickets, ID photos and a washing machine.
4. An individual appointment for everyone on 6 August 2015.

At the end of the day, the protesters signed an agreement with the director of Emmaüs, Aurélie El Hassak-Marzorati. They released this statement about their victory:

Statement by the migrants of the Emmaüs Solidarité shelter in Joinville-le-Pont:

Today we demonstrated and blocked the center in order to win our demands. Our action brought results. Now we need to make sure that management's promises become reality. We are ready to go back on strike, if necessary. Today taught us a lesson; that it is possible to make our voice heard, when we are strong and determined. We thank all those who came to support us in solidarity. Without them none of this would have been possible. We say this to all migrants: It is through struggle and organizing that we can win papers and housing for all! We will be at the demonstration tomorrow, Wednesday, 5 August at 6:30pm at the side of the migrants at Austerlitz.

\*) note of the translator: public interest grouping, the association sub-contracted by the prefecture to accompany migrants in the shelter in their asylum procedures; in the Paris region this is Habitat interventions sociales.

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## **STATEMENT BY THE MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES OF THE PERNETY SHELTER IN THE 14TH DISTRICT OF PARIS**

**august 11  
2015**

**Pernety -  
Paris 14e**

On Tuesday, 11 August 2015, at midnight, we, migrants and refugees of the Pernety shelter, have collectively decided to go on hunger strike in order to get a response to our legitimate demands in the face of the inhumane conditions we experience at the shelter, and in the face of management's continued silence despite our numerous attempts to alert them so that they may find solutions.

We speak out against the poor quality of the food, the lack of cleanliness, the almost total absence of medical treatment, and most of all the extremely slow domiciliations and administrative procedures for asylum seekers, not to mention the lack of public transport tickets or phone cards.

On Wednesday, 12 August 2015, at 3pm we decided together, after the shelter's management refused for the umpteenth time to meet our demands, to lock the shelter's door. We, migrants and refugees, made this decision ourselves, and not those external supporters who came to support our action. When the director asked to leave, we let him go. Furthermore, in the presence of the police who had arrived in the meantime, we also let an employee of the shelter leave as they had asked to.

After the end of the hunger strike a delegation of three people, who said they represented the City of Paris and the Mairie of the 14th district came to see us and promised to find solutions, but, up to now, Friday, 14 August 2015, we have not seen any.

We also provided a document containing our demands to the police. The question is, however, why no-one even asked us why we were on hunger strike?

Why were we considered as less than human? Why were we treated without respect and consideration? There were, after all, 24 of us present at that time!!

The migrants and refugees staying at the Pernety shelter since 29 July 2015

## DOUBLE-STANDARDS: TRIEL, EMMAÜS

Early in the morning on Saturday, 7 November, around 30 members of a far-right group occupied the roof of the shelter in Triel to decry the fact that 80 migrants were housed there. For over five hours the

people living there had to stay locked up in the center.

november 7  
2015  
Triel-sur-  
Seine

When questioned by some associations about possible legal proceedings in response to this fascist aggression, the sub-prefect of the Yvelines region, M. Stéphane Grauvogel, stated that it seemed, in his view, not possible to characterize the action as incitement of racial hatred, as the banners and slogans were, according to him, at the limit of the law, but did not breach it. For him, the only possible charge is violation of private property... It bears, however, mentioning that the week before the rooftop occupation, several migrants were physically assaulted, in particular at the Triel station, by people making racist comments. But still, for M. Grauvogel, all this is obviously not connected...

Thus, for the state and the justice system, breaking into a shelter to climb onto the roof and shout hostile slogans and throw smoke grenades, so that the people housed there are shut in for more than half the day, is not very serious. On the other hand, supporting migrants during a hunger strike at their shelter is much more bothersome...

Indeed, last November, four people were sentenced to substantial fines and suspended prison sentences for their presence in solidarity with migrants housed in a shelter in the 14th district run by the association Emmaüs.

The three activists and the migrant, who accompanied them to help with translation, had gone to this shelter in Rue Losserand in August to support 30 migrants on hunger strike and to help them write down their grievances in French, so that they could communicate them to the media and the authorities.

That day the migrants wrote about their living conditions: «We speak out against the poor quality of the food, the lack of cleanliness, the almost total absence of medical treatment, and most of all the extremely slow domiciliations and administrative procedures for asylum seekers, not to mention the lack of public transport tickets or phone cards.»

Although they had been invited to enter by the shelter's director and staid in solidarity during the protest sit-in organized by the migrants, those four people were taken away by force by hordes of police in less than half an hour.



## RAID ON THE SHELTER MARC SEGUIN

On 15 December 2015 40 residents of the Marc Seguin migrant worker hostel in the 18th district were arrested. Twenty were placed in detention. Police blocked the street and entered the shelter with dogs, went into the rooms. They made those they had pushed outside wait for several hours in the rain and checked everyone's ID. Adoma, the company that manages the shelter, tried to intimidate the residents, who have been on rent strike for several months and demand an improvement in living conditions. On 9 January a demonstration brought together several hundred people in solidarity with the residents of the hostel and for the liberation of the 20 undocumented people locked up in the detention center at Vincennes. But sadly, several residents were deported during the month of January.

15  
décembre  
2015

Marc  
Seguin  
Paris 18e

This raid is reminiscent of another one, in the early morning of 12 February 2008, when the AFTAM migrant workers hostel at 43 Rue des Terres au Curé in the 13th district was attacked by several hundred police officers, who also closed off the entire neighbourhood. Police smashed the doors of many rooms and confiscated passports and resident cards. Two people were panicked by the intrusion of police with dogs and were injured when they tried to flee through the window. They had to be hospitalized. Ultimately 116 people were arrested in this raid and subsequently detained, with 105 of them locked up at the detention center at Vincennes. Activists, neighbours and friends of the residents mobilized immediately. The very same day a demonstration was held, as well as a rally in front of the Vincennes detention center. For several days people also expressed solidarity by their presence at tribunals and airports in order to prevent the deportation of hostel residents. This unrelenting mobilisation for just over a month prevented the deportation of 99 of the 105 detained people.

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## ONE WORD = ONE BOMB ? MERHABA IS NOT WELCOME AT THE HOUSING CENTER LE LOIRET

In mid-December, a friend and I went to this center to visit some people who stay there that we got to know at last June's camps. We also brought some copies of Merhaba, this small newspaper made by migrants and people who are in solidarity with them.

One migrant friend invited us to come in, and asked the guard at the door for permission. The man said that he had to ask the head of the center, and did so over the phone. We were not allowed to come in, so we staid on one of the benches in front of the center. While we were talking with a few people, some people who seemed to work inside the center arrived and shortly afterwards the guard came to tell us that we couldn't stay on the bench in front of the center either. His boss had called to tell him that. We could easily believe this, as he looked quite embarrassed. As we took a few minutes to say goodbye, the same guard told us that it would really be better if we hurry, because if did not, he would get into trouble.

Someone who lives at the center took about ten copies of the newspaper and went back inside as we walked away. Less than five minutes later, he came back out because staff had told him that he could

have only one copy, not several. To put it in a nutshell, someone living in the center was forbidden to take home about ten copies of a small newspaper in different languages, made by people in similar situations to him, who live in other centers... When I think that among the migrants, there are people fleeing from countries where there is no freedom of expression, and where France is held up as an example by some gentle dreamers, I can't help but laugh softly.

What can appears as incidental reveals a lot about migrants' rights and the way they are treated. They are not allowed to invite people, nor to have newspapers (except, I imagine, tabloids)? Beyond that, lots of people and people in different centers explain that they can't express themselves, because if they say what they think, they risk being harrassed or kicked out. Yes, I know, the saying goes that words can work like a bomb, but we are far from that point. The migrants' demands are actually more on the level of asking for more food, which is not much of a bomb, even if the staff don't handle it well.

december  
16  
2015

Loiret  
Paris 13e

Those employees take part in the process of denying the migrants all ability to make decisions and organize, even if they often do so unconsciously, reproducing a certain pattern. In this way, they are themselves prisoners of an effective logic, that we have all experienced at different moments in our lives and in different social spaces: at school, at work, in the hospital...

This little story does not only happen at the Le Loiret center. In Tournan, it's the same, a few people from outside come and the staff is suddenly ready to call the police. In Triel sur Seine it's also like that. Only 3 people who don't work at the center are allowed to come in, and they are from the NGO Secours Catholique. Everyone else, even if they are meeting someone living in the center, cannot come in, but rather they have to meet outside. Here, there were even insinuations that people belonging to the support committee for migrants are in competition with the Red Cross, an

organisation that brings, of course, well-intentioned people together, and that also runs the center...

Most of the directors of the centers justify themselves by saying they have to protect the migrants from outside people, who want to instrumentalize them... Beyond this stupid pretext, which serves to discredit people who show solidarity with the refugees, and allows to criminalize them more easily later on, we can see the whole extent of the racist and colonial mentality that underlies such discourses: people considered as migrants are infantilized, and denied their right and ability to be responsible people, with choices and political views... and this is meant to be for their own good! But it's true that, since the 15th century, Europeans are able to bring together their bad habit to use force and violence to coerce people by conflating their exactions with the idea of the good...

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## PRESS RELEASE OF MIGRANTS SHELTERED AT THE CHU OF VILLENEUVE-LA-GARENNE

*Refugees are sheltered there since 23 October, since the evacuation of high school Jean Quarré in Paris. Following this press release a gathering will no doubt be held if nothing improves for the 45 people who live there and are suffering real mistreatment.*

**W**e are refugees from various countries: Sudan, Eritrea, Somalia...

We faced the desert and the sea to escape death.

We're staying at a shelter center in Villeneuve-la-Garenne managed by the Red Cross.

We're shocked by the conditions we're subjected to in this center.

We denounce:

- The exclusion of several people for no reason, kicked out one after another.

- The false statements made by the management of the center to get the police to intervene a number of times, thus dissuading us from complaining or denouncing our living conditions. Following an intervention that the police themselves admitted was unjustified, we objected to our living conditions and, miraculously, obtained hot water and heating, which we had been waiting for for a week.

- The contemptuous behavior of the employees and their constant attempts to humiliate us (racist remarks, aggressive gestures, threats of expulsion...)

- The lack of medical assistance

- The repeated errors in the register of verification of presence and of times of entrance and exit. People present aren't noted and thus risk being thrown out of the center. Although certain errors appear to be unintentional, others are intentional and target people who stood up for their rights -- a means of threatening them with expulsion.

- The denial of the right to circulate due to the non-availability of public transport tickets.

- Hygiene problems: sheets and blankets are never cleaned and there aren't bathroom necessities or toilet paper.

We demand that the management take responsibility and fulfil its role.

We demand:

- The replacement of employees with threatening or violent behavior and who have made racist remarks.

- The holding of periodic meetings with the management in the presence of a qualified and neutral translator

- Respectful behavior and treatment by employees, the end of the system of verifying presence and of exclusions.



**december  
29  
2015**

**Villeneuve-  
la-Garenne**

We also demand the improvement of our living conditions:

- Varied and balanced meals (for the last month we've been eating the same thing)
- Public transport tickets to circulate freely and so as not to expose us to fines and problems with the police.
- Medical care and follow-up for all.

- Availability of bathroom necessities, hygiene products and underwear.

- Warm blankets and clean sheets.
- French language courses, cultural and sport activities, and an internet connection – as promised by the management of the center and the mayor.

*Press release drafted Tuesday 29 December*

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## **PRESS RELEASE OF THE MIGRANTS EXPELLED FROM THE RUE DU LOIRET SHELTER (ASSOCIATION AURORE)**

**January 7  
2016**

**Loiret  
Paris 13e**

On Tuesday 6 January the migrants staying at the Aurore shelter center in the 13th arrondissement begin a protest movement against their living conditions. The following day the police intervene at the request of the center's management. The migrants are taken to the police station then released, except for two of them, and excluded from the shelter. That evening, their belongings are deposited on the sidewalk. Again, they're faced with living in the street. They decide to go to the refugee camp in place de la République.

Here's their press release:

"We are refugees who have been sheltered at the rue du Loiret (13th) center for several months. We want to understand why we were arrested yesterday.

We had a lot of problems in this center:

1. the director's racist attitude
2. administrative procedures that didn't progress
3. illnesses due to living conditions and to staff who ignore the problems
4. rotten food. Water available only in bathroom sink, which causes illness
5. staff who enter rooms without warning and go through our belongings
6. meal trays removed while we're still eating
7. closure of refectory after one hour although the rules stipulate it should be open for one and a half hours

We spoke several times with the director about these problems but he doesn't listen to us and responds "If you're not happy, leave." He also said: "Why are you complaining? You were in the street and we gave you shelter." No other response was provided.

Tuesday, we went to the 13th arrondissement mayor's office to raise our problems. We were sent to another place and there the person in charge told us to see the managers of the center. When we got back, we found the director at the entrance of the center. He dismissed our requests and said with contempt: "If you're displeased with the situation, all you have to do is leave." We thus decided to stay in the entrance of the center and to not eat or drink. The police came and asked us why we were on hunger strike. We explained the situation to them but they replied that they didn't have a solution and that it wasn't their responsibility. We thus continued the hunger strike.

The next day, Wednesday, the director accused us of blocking the doors of the center despite the fact that people were free to come and go. The serving of meals for the other residents took place as normal, as the employees who served it can testify.

We again requested that the director find a solution to our problems.

Late in the afternoon the police arrived at the center and surrounded us. They searched us, confiscated our keys and took us to the police station. There they again searched us, verified our identities and took our fingerprints. Then they told us to leave. When we arrived at the center that night our belongings had been put outside. The police were stationed in front of the gate and forbid us access, asking that we leave.

We want to know:

1. Why were we expelled from the center?
2. Why were we searched?
3. Why did the police not hear our version of what happened but only the director's version?

We demand that our rights be respected. We want justice and equality."

# Yet another source of abuse: the pre-reception to apply for asylum!

Since 1 November 2015, the state has put in place a pre-reception for people who wish to apply for asylum. The asylum seekers now have to go through a subcontracted association in order to get an appointment at the prefecture. It is no longer possible to apply for asylum at the prefecture without first going through this association. In every department one association is contracted to undertake this work.

## COALLIA LIMAY

In the Yvelines, for example, Coallia is in charge. There is only one office for the entire department, 20 minutes on foot from the Limay station, a town which is already in a remote location of the department. Coallia allocates appointments to claim asylum on Mondays only as the prefecture only allocates them around 50 interviews each week. This means that by 11am on Monday all of them are already booked!

In practice, people arrive the day before or even two days earlier, hoping to be received. Thus, on Monday 4 January, 10 people who had slept in front were asked to come back the following Monday. On 11 January, 20 were turned away; and the following Monday there were even more!

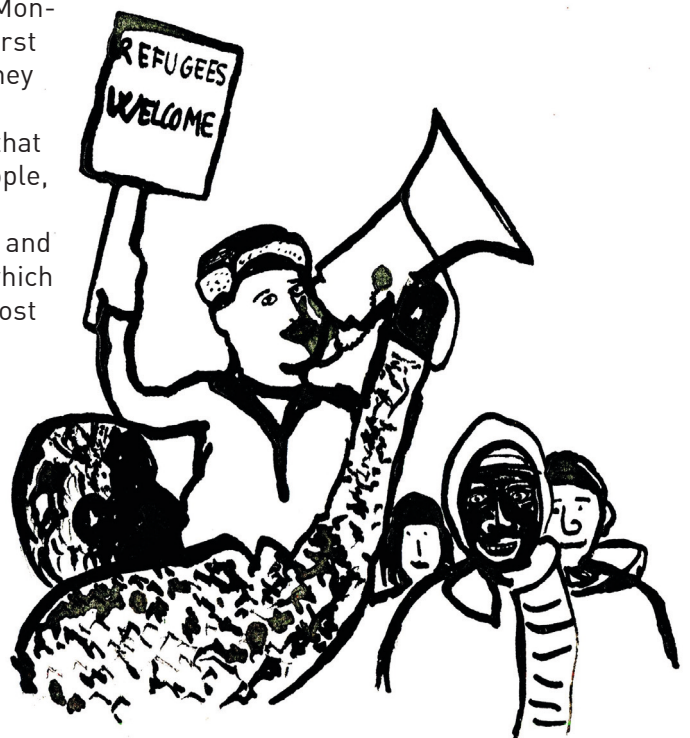
There is of course neither seating, nor toilets for those who wait outside in the cold, there is not even a café in the area! As the association is located on the ground floor of a social housing block, the asylum seekers sometimes go into the building to warm up or sleep for a couple of hours in the night. On several occasions this has led to conflicts with the residents, who are themselves in precarious situations. This puts the asylum seekers at risk. Coallia has also already called the police to disperse migrants, when too many were there when the association opened. This happened, for example, in mid-November when 60 migrants waited for an appointment. On that day Coallia saw 12 migrants, the others were dispersed by the cops. However, they had all been sent there by emergency shelters, were they had been housed following the evacuations of encampments in Paris. Their housing in the shelters is conditional upon the progress of their asylum application; not pursuing the procedures means returning to the streets...

## IN HAUTS-DE-SEINE, IT'S THE FACEM

Here again appointments are only given on Mondays. On Monday, 18 January, at 6:30am 150 people were waiting. The first person had been there since Sunday afternoon. By 7am they were around 200! Just like in Limay, people are waiting in line, standing close together in the cold, bearing in mind that during that night it was minus five degrees. For some people, this was their third attempt to get an appointment.

At the reception, two arrogant security guards in uniform and boots give orders to those queuing. There is also a dog, which belongs to one of the security guards. It is attached to a post near the line and barks constantly.

On that day, 60 people were seen, although earlier, in the morning, it had been announced that 75 people would be accepted. But around noon, having handed out 60 tickets, the guard declared that none were left...: Staff respond to those protesting and asking for explanations by shouting (in English): «Go back, go back. Come back next Monday, no ticket now, you understand me?» Under threat by the guards and their dog, the people have no choice but to lower their heads and leave again...



## FTDA PARIS

It's the same ordeal in Paris, where the contract for the pre-reception was awarded to France Terre d'asile. One has to get there very early in the morning, around 3 or 4am. The guard at the entrance is meant to keep a semblance of order and to organize the people on the sidewalk. He arranges queues without explaining in which queue someone has to go. This leads to conflicts, because having waited outside since 3am and then being assigned the wrong queue by the guard is enough to get worked up!

Then it's waiting for hours in the cold, enduring the racist jokes of the guards about how meek the Chinese are in contrast to the Arabs...

The queue is so long (more than 120 people at times) that it extends into the street and leads annoyed drivers to honk.

Often FTDA decide to close. It's too much for them. Too many fights, too much disrespect as they say, too much risk for the employees, too many complaints from the neighbors...

Too much of everything. Except they should have thought of all that before accepting the public contract and all the money that comes with it. Budget? We put it in!

Now they are a subcontractor of Ofii and they knew beforehand, when they applied to have this contract, that it would not be feasible. In order to get it, over the other big players of the sector (Coallia, the Red Cross, Adoma...), they had to review their rates and lower costs as much as possible. Then they hired people knowing that the required workload could not be met. They knew they would wear out their employees within a year. They knew that asylum seekers would be badly received or more often than not, not at all – in this case one can't really speak of a reception.

Of course, we can still use the line that we are associations that defend the right to asylum! Of course we do!

Today you are a sub-administration, for the prefecture at least has a coffee machine and adequate toilets. The platform does not even do half of the things it's supposed to. It could never do them all, because the system of the new reform is such that that's impossible. Two examples.

The law says that you have to register an asylum seeker within three days. What a joke! Today, when you go to FTDA, you are given a kind of ticket that is of no great use – as though if you were controlled by police, this could protect you from anything – on this an appointment for mid-April 2016 is noted. As a result you are not only not considered an asylum seeker for another four months, although the law says three days, but furthermore you are meant to fend for yourself while waiting for housing, food, health care, etc...

The platform also has to fill out the documents for OPFRA for all those who are not housed by the Ofii or in a CADA, which is the majority of people (chiffres CADA??). FTDA has hired guards, reception staff, and so on, but only two social workers to do this work, although it is crucial for applicants; filling out one's OPFRA form, writing one's asylum account, preparing for the interview by an OPFRA officer, who will question you to find out if you are lying.

This situation at the platforms is illegal and outrageous. Many condemn it. Yet it will undoubtedly persist, because they love to mistreat migrants in France in the hope that by making them suffer enough, they will leave again until the EU can put in place its plan for a hermetic closure of the borders, which will not happen overnight! Horrified by this situation, staff of those associations have written a text, in which they denounce the inhumane conditions that the state and their employers force them to inflict on the migrants.

Photo of the notice posted on 17 December on the door of the association for the reception of asylum seekers Coal-lia in Limay.

THIS NEWSPAPER IS WRITTEN BY MIGRANTS AND PEOPLE IN SOLIDARITY WITH THEIR STRUGGLE. IT'S SPREAD IN FRENCH, ARABIC, ENGLISH AND FARSI, IN THE SHELTERS, DURING DEMONSTRATIONS AND ON CAMPEMENTS IN PARIS REGION AND BEYOND.

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