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Newspaper of discussion and news about migrants struggles

مرحبا

#5

May 1st 2016

Migrant Encampments: Obtaining Accommodation Depends on Political Visibility



Encampment
of rue Pajol,
July 2015

For a year and a half, several thousand migrants and undocumented people have set up collective encampments in Paris, because they were in the street and the French authorities (the State and the City of Paris) did nothing to receive them.

Several encampments succeeded each other thus around the La Chapelle métro station (line 2), at Rue Pajol, Rue d'Aubervilliers (Jardin d'Eole) or Square Jes-saint. There was also an encampment in front of the City Hall of the 18th district (Métro Jules-Joffrin, line 12) and briefly in front of the main City Hall of Paris (Métro Hôtel-de-Ville, line 1). Then, during autumn, there were several successive encampments at Place de la République, before a first camp was recently set up around the Stalingrad métro station (line 2), which was followed by a second and now a third one. These encampments allow migrants to regroup, to help each other and to organise their survival in the street. They have lasted for more or less long periods of time, from a few days to few weeks. From early August to the end of October 2015 a disused high school was occupied by hundreds of migrants near the métro station Place des Fêtes (line 11).

The first large encampment, set up between la Chapelle and Barbès stations in the autumn of 2014, lasted for over six months without any solution being offered to the migrants; several people died of cold or illness. While the migrants in the street were invisible, the authorities adopted the policy of letting the situation deteriorate and migrants die in complete indifference. But gathering together also allows for a visibility, which can become bothersome for the authorities and force them to concede spots in emergency shelters. The eviction of the encampment on 2 June 2015 constituted a vast operation to disperse the migrants with arbitrary allocations of shelter spots, and those for only a few days. It also attracted a lot of media coverage and was the starting point for the development of support by local residents and other people who acted in solidarity, whether they belonged to associations or not.

Rather than the simply physical existence of the encampments, it is their political visibility that increases the speed at which spots in emergency shelter are obtained. Thus, in June, it was only after multiple demonstrations and the occupation of a building in order to inhabit it, the former fire station in Rue Louis Blanc, that spaces in shelters were 'pulled out of their hat' by the City of Paris and the prefecture for the migrants who took part in this action. In contrast, for the encampment at Quai d'Austerlitz, which was much less visible and more «well-behaved», it took several months to open up spaces in shelters.

In the face of the significant visibilisation of migrants and strong mobilisation of supporters the authorities (State and City) then adopted a more aggressive strategy to prevent any new encampments being set up, systematically using force and deploying police to try and disperse migrants, isolating them even further.

But the migrants' determination to stay together when there were enough of them and the support of local residents forced the authorities to let encampments develop, which grew rapidly with new arrivals every day. This did not always happen immediately, sometimes it took several attempts at the same location, after the evacuations by the police using force and roundups of migrants, who were taken to the police station before being released. But the migrants did not give up and came back evening after evening, mobilising supporters until they were able to set up camp thanks to the degree of pressure that had been created.

Under no circumstances are the encampments a solution for the migrants, a space where they can pursue their administrative procedures while receiving material assistance. Living conditions there are disastrous. They are above all spaces that allow to gain shelter thanks to the visibility they create.

Each of the encampments mentioned here was eventually evacuated with spots in shelters being allocated to all migrants present at the encampment at the moment of the evacuation. To obtain this, the migrants did not simply wait. At several encampments, they released public statements, put up banners, organised demonstrations, public parties and rallies, all actions that allow both political voice and visibility.

None of those victories could have been gained without the determination of the migrants themselves. Their resolve to demand that their rights are respected led to the solidarity and support of part of the population.



Occupation of an empty fire stations, 11 June 2015



Demonstration République-Barbès, 9 July 2015



Occupation of a vacant High School from 31 July to 23 October 2015

This fight continues, because in France, like elsewhere in Europe, if one has no papers and no money, one cannot look after one's health, or find decent housing, or get around. One can only be exploited, be it by a boss or a pimp. And it continues also because the difficulties continue once housing in shelters has been obtained: the struggle continues for papers, for stable housing, for the right to work without too much exploitation, to have one's family come or to go to another country, if one so chooses. Because there are always people in the street, be they migrants or not. Because every time encampments have been evacuated with spots in shelters being offered, dozens of migrants, who had gone away, even if just for an instant, were left behind and then joined by newcomers, with no solution, but to create a new encampment.



25 July 2015, demonstration Bastille-République, during the week end of solidarity against borders (Ventimiglia, Balkans' route...)



Saturday 24 October 2015, the following day of the eviction of occupied High School Jean Quarré, demonstration against borders

Migrants' testimonies from the third encampment at Stalingrad



2nd encampment at Stalingrad, March 2016

The Country of the Myth of Freedom

Europe, land of freedoms and human rights – one of the biggest lies on earth. But actually everything is a lie.

Barely arrived in Italy, I discovered the bitter reality. We were welcomed by the Italian police, who used force and violence without helping us in our need. We were taken to Sicily and detained for a whole day. Then they took our fingerprints by force. When we refused, they beat us and gave us electrical shocks on the hands until we lost consciousness. In Italy there was neither humanity nor freedom.

We went through great hardship. It took us a week to get to France. In France we also experience the same difficulties, nobody cares about us, the police don't tell us where to turn to ask for help. Life is tough. Sleeping in the street, in rain and cold. We fled our countries because of security problems there, but there is no safety in Europe either.

We came to Europe for safety, peace and a better life, but we have fled dreadful conditions only to find even worse ones. A life stuck in fog. There is no hope, there are no human rights. But where to go? It would be better to die in our countries than to die in the country of the myth of freedom.

It's been more than three years since I left Afghanistan. It took me 20 days from Afghanistan to get to Bulgaria.

I passed through Pakistan, then Iran (by the region of Baluchistan, which is very dangerous because of the Taliban).

In Bulgaria I was jailed for three and a half months in a detention centre for migrants, where police stole my money and beat me. I also saw the police beat other migrants. In the prison there was nothing to eat. People went to buy food outside and then resold it to the detained. The shops are run by the prison staff.

After Bulgaria I passed through Serbia, then Hungary, Austria, and finally I arrived in France. This took me altogether eight months. I have been living in France for 20 months in the parks and streets. I have neither papers nor a home. I had my interview at OFPRA two months ago, but I still haven't received a reply.

The French government should fight those because of whom we are in France. In my village, close to the border with Pakistan, there are daily attacks and bombings by the government of Pakistan, by the Taliban and by Daesh. Our houses and schools are destroyed. My family were killed in Afghanistan. Today, I would just like to have a quiet life in France.



My name is Imed, I'm 21 and I'm Libyan. I couldn't stand to live in my country anymore, because the situation was very hard. My country is no longer what it was, it is torn apart. Thousand of people are ending up on the streets. There are 1200 militias and two governments.

I couldn't stand it any longer to live in a country under the yoke of militias and terrorist organizations who murder and kidnap Libyan people in the name of religion. It is unfortunate, but we have been living for a long time in a society governed by tribal rules.

I want to live as a citizen without being a soldier, a militia man, or being enlisted by force, like in ordinary countries. I want to be able to study. I want to fulfill my dreams, to flourish, to live like normal people.

If the ministers or militias of my country were to discover that this is my story, if they caught me, they would sentence me to death without hesitation, without any other kind of trial, and they would burn me alive.

My mom saw her brothers die. She died of a heart attack after that.

Where I live, there are two different militias looking for me, dead or alive.

So I had to make the decision to cross the sea. I was on a 12 meters long old tub with 550 other refugees (Eritreans, Somalis, women, children and babies ...). The crossing was hell. I suffered personally, but I was especially traumatized by all the distressed children. I saw some of them die. The crossing took around 14 hours. Halfway through it, we saw an Italian army helicopter. They warned Navy ships. When we got close to the land, the Italian authorities were waiting for us. We stayed 5 days in Italy. We were welcomed warmly there, contrary to France.

There were two Tunisians with us who were deported immediately. They let me go because I am Libyan. I said I wanted to go to France. I took the train towards the country I'd dreamt of visiting ever since my childhood. But in reality it was a real shock to find myself utterly dispossessed in the rain, cold and hungry in the heart of the "City of Lights". I'm sick and my health is not compatible with the suffering and the misery of the street camps.

I expect from the French government that it deigns to look at our situation. For example there are not many of us Libyans. And I'm asking: Where are the 25% of the oil that the French are taking in Libya, and where is Nicolas Sarkozy ?

The French government has to assume responsibility for the refugees that are fleeing war in Libya.



My name is Hassan, I'm from Eritrea: I had troubles in my country. There is segregation based on religion and a lot of people, like me, suffer from this problem. As I'm an orphan, I decided to leave Eritrea to go to Sudan where I stayed for a long time. I was alone.

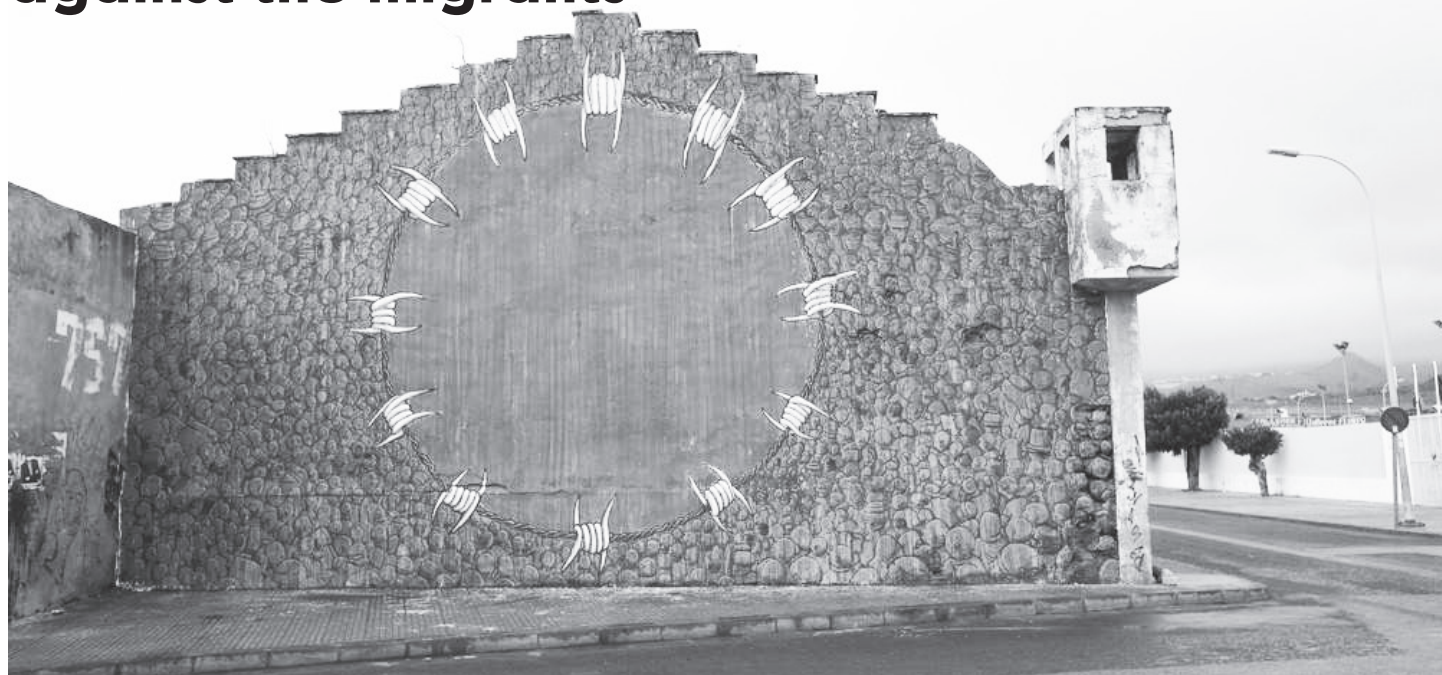
However, the reality in Sudan didn't interest me: there were a lot of issues. So I decided to go to Libya. Unfortunately, there is no government in Libya, leaving the field free to criminal gangs. I then decided to come to the European continent by crossing the Mediterranean Sea because I thought I would find rights and freedom there. The crossing of the sea took around 7 days. I arrived in Italy and I lived through very hard days, I became like a child of the streets.

I slept on the streets, I was cold under a daily rain and I had no idea where I was. After that, I managed to get to Vintimille. I wanted to go to France but the problem was that Italian police officers maltreated me and hit me. I tried a second time but the situation repeated itself. I didn't know where I could go or where I could find food and a place to sleep. One time, it worked: I finally managed to cross the border and get to Paris.

The French government doesn't take care of us. Here too, the same situation happens all over again. I don't know where to sleep, how I can find food. Nobody is helping to improve the situation and the French government doesn't protect refugees from cold and hunger. It doesn't provide us the means to be in a healthy and safe situation.

When I came here, I thought I left a country where I was in danger of death and I would arrive in a country where the government would help me. Since I'm in France, I have received no help from the French government and no protection.

We must not let the governments fight their war against the migrants



In Paris, in Calais or at Europe's borders, the policies authorities have put in place are aimed at preventing the greatest possible number of migrants from moving or settling where they want in an EU country. The laws are mostly against migrants and in practice have only one objective: to dissuade the maximum number to come and convince those already here to leave. In such a situation, an increasingly coercive legislative arsenal is being put in place against foreigners. The few laws that are supposed to protect them aren't enforced or are only after procedures that are hard to access and hardly known to most of us, migrants or non-migrants.

The aim of European policy is to prevent the maximum number of migrants from arriving in Europe

The policies in place at Europe's borders show that, contrary to what is stipulated in international agreements on the protection of refugees, everything is done to refuse, directly or indirectly, right of asylum to the greatest number of people fleeing their country. The announcements of the European Union have always meant: it's necessary to filter refugees and to send back those who don't fit the "criteria." How does this work in practice?

The joint EU policy regarding asylum, immigration and border control is aimed in particular at assuring the control of individuals and the surveillance of the crossing of the EU's borders. It puts in place a series of measures at the borders to prevent the maximum number of refugees from entering the territory of the EU: the reinforcement and militarization of controls on the Mediterranean, as well as the setting up of "hot spots," recently transformed into detention centers; the closing one after another of borders on the Balkans route; the signing of readmission agreements with countries that

asylum seekers leave or travel through and to which they can be deported; the hardening of deportation policy regarding so-called "economic" migrants or those from countries considered "safe" – these are some examples among many others.

Whereas these measures have no dissuasive effect, since the reasons people have to flee their countries continue to exist, they considerably increase the risks refugees run during their journey to Europe. In 2015, over 5,000 migrants died in the Mediterranean. At borders, migrants are subject to harsh and permanent repression by State authorities, as well as by private militias; increased surveillance of migration routes increases dependence on smugglers (whom Europe nevertheless claims it wants to fight); confiscation of migrants' possessions in certain countries to finance their stay during processing of their asylum demand also jeopardizes the possibility of their future settlement. Again, the list is far from being exhaustive!

France doesn't respect legal provisions

The difficulties migrants encounter don't stop once they reach the country in which they want to apply for asylum. In France, despite the government's announce-

ments about welcoming refugees everything is done to keep migrants in situations of vulnerability and isolation, without protection or administrative status.

The wait to file an asylum request is several months (when it's supposed to be several days or weeks at most). During this waiting period the requester is left without any of the assistance s/he has a right to – were the legal guarantees enforced (housing, stipend). Once the request is filed, the refugee has to wait many months for an interview and then a response. Although the law provides for housing for asylum seekers, most of the time no housing is offered, forcing them to live in the street for the duration of the processing of their request. To the administrative repression is then added police repression, with the risk of being deported, the threat of administrative detention. France doesn't hesitate any more to deport to countries where there's civil war (Afghanistan, Sudan...).

Migrants speak of the inequalities in processing by OFPRA and arbitrariness during the interview (length, questions asked): "OFPRA begins with the assumption that migrants are liars. Even when the story is true, protection can be refused because the information given isn't that "expected" by OFPRA agents."

At the end, only one asylum seeker out of four obtains refugee status. The rest become illegal aliens, without documents or rights, facing difficulties finding housing or work – and constantly under the threat of deportation.

Particularly in Paris

What we've seen in Paris over the last ten months is the huge abyss between the official announcements of the State and the mayor's office, and the reality of what the people concerned are actually going through.

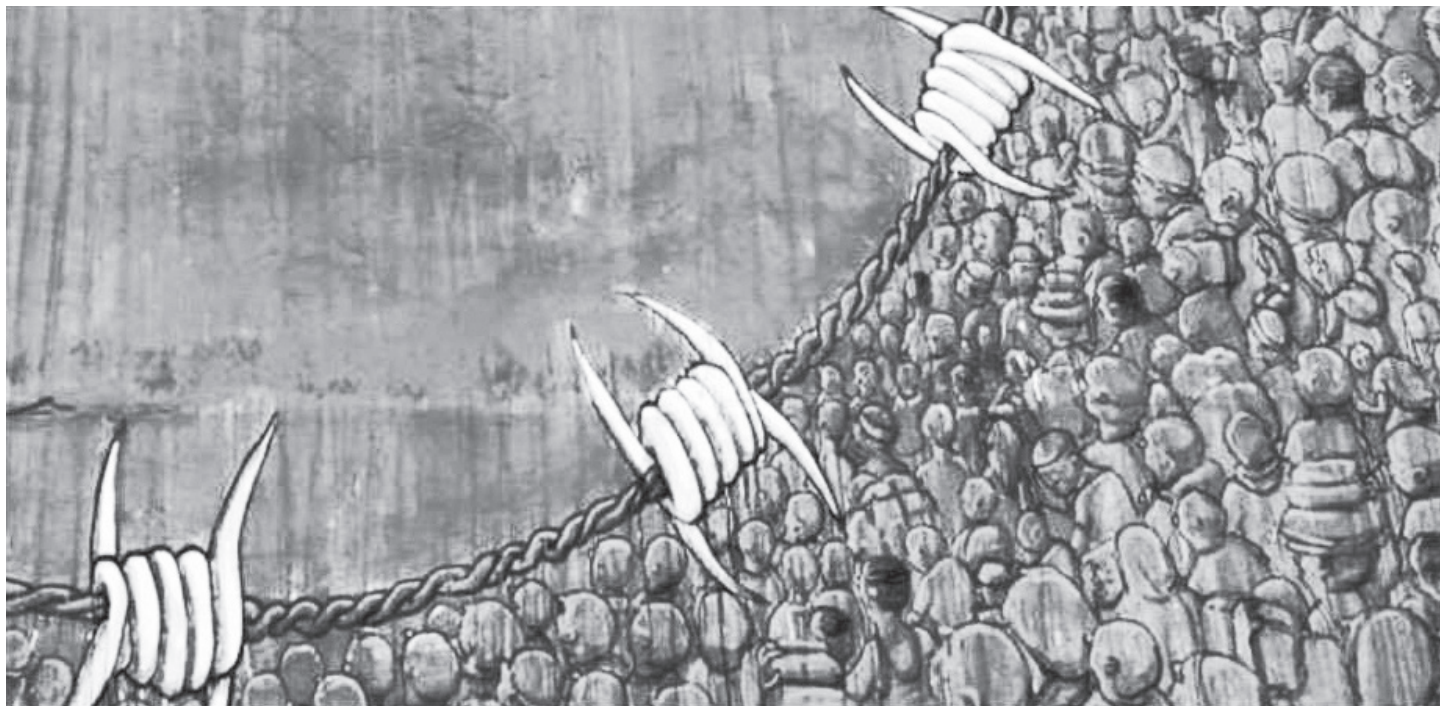
If certain of them have been able to obtain shelter, these are victories gained through their activism, the visibility coming from direct action and public speech (distribution of tracts, banners, demonstrations, discussions with neighbors, media appearances...)

But shelter doesn't always mean assistance: only a small percentage of centers offer decent conditions, many people were placed in centers or hotels in the middle of nowhere (Châtenay-Malabry, Aulnay-sous-Bois...), without food and with no administrative follow-up. In many other centers, migrants have had to fight for the most basic rights (food, decent sleeping conditions, an end to humiliation...)

Finally, these last weeks the State was found guilty by an administrative court of exceeding the deadline for the appointment to file asylum requests, following class action suits: the new law provides for a three-day deadline, whereas today people have to wait four months... Even the State jurisdiction acknowledges that the Prefecture doesn't implement the law!

All of which shows that neither the government nor the administration have any interest in finding a political solution, and violate most of the time what the law requires, by excluding people and keeping them in inhuman living conditions.

And without mobilization and without opposition, they'll continue to!



Detail from a graffiti mural by Banksy in Barcelona, Spain, September 2015

Some social and political events happening in France these days

A protest movement against new labor legislation proposed by the government has started in France. If it passes, the El Khomri law will make the already precarious situation of all workers, with and without papers, worse.

The current situation of workers in France

In France too, the situation of working people is difficult. There is a lot of unemployment, precarious contracts (people work part-time, or interim, are hired by the week or the day, without any certainty that they will be hired again). It is hard to find housing, to pay the bills, to get good medical care, to feed oneself... The situation is even harder for migrant workers, with or without papers.

There is labor legislation that protects employees, but also undeclared workers (such as undocumented people, even if it is more complicated for them). This legislation is the result of successful workers' struggles since the 19th century. Those rights that the government and the bosses have conceded to workers have been hard won by force, through at times very long strikes, through occupations and demonstrations...

Labor law sets minimum working conditions: an employer cannot lay off workers at will, working hours, wages, breaks and night work are regulated, child labor is prohibited, workers' health and safety have to be protected. All this is the law, but already today it is not always respected!

Employing undocumented workers allows to lower wages

To get around the labor law, bosses hire under the table, that is without declaring workers. Hiring an undocumented worker allows the boss to save a lot of money (he does not declare them, so he does not pay social security or taxes), and he can always intimidate them by threatening to fire or report them! Thus many undocumented workers are paid less and work more under worse conditions, because they cannot defend themselves.

Why does the government close the borders? Why doesn't the French state regularise the undocumented people in France? In this way it can keep undocumented workers in a situation that forces them to work under any and all conditions without being able to defend themselves. Keeping migrants destitute allows to scare them and to turn them into docile workers, because they are always in danger.

This also allows the state and the bosses to create competition between workers with and workers without papers, to divide them and to maintain a climate of fear (fear of foreigners who steal jobs), that leads to worsening working conditions for all.

The new law will make things worse for everyone

The labor law protects all workers; it's a minimum basis that applies everywhere, nationwide. If the El Khomri law passes, this will no longer be the case. At company level working conditions will worsen, working time can increase to up to 60 hours per week and 12 hours per day. Workers will be forced to accept this, because layoffs will be possible simply upon the decision of the boss without any protection of employees.

This rollback of rights will be most important for the most precarious (women, undocumented workers) in particular when it comes to defending oneself against one's boss. It is already difficult to defend one's rights, and it will get harder still with the new law. Taking one's boss to the industrial tribunal (the court that deals with labor disputes) is very hard now and would be even less feasible. The law affects all workers. The most precarious, who work already under very difficult conditions will be under even more pressure. The difference between declared and under-the-table workers will be increasingly slim.

A tool to defend ourselves: the strike!

The overall protections have been won through social movements. Movements of undocumented people in France fight for papers, but also against the working conditions imposed on them. They demand equal treatment with the other workers in France.

At this moment, a struggle demanding the withdrawal of the proposed legislation is starting. Strike-days are planned, there is a base of workers, who are determined to fight, especially in the transport sector; SNCF, RATP. There are also many young people involved; in universities and secondary schools general assemblies are being held and actions planned. There will be very large demonstrations (probably of several hundred thousand people), and certainly also occupations, blockades and assemblies.

During this protest movement all people in the struggle will be able to come together and talk, and migrants can make their voices and their demands heard. Amongst those who are on strike and involved in the struggle will be those who are traditionally most supportive of equal rights for migrants and non-migrants, and of freedom of movement and residence for all, that is papers for all (or no papers at all).

So that the government and the bosses can't divide the most precarious people even more, it's important to struggle together for better conditions for all workers.

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Banner «Solidarity with Refugees»
at the encampment at Place de la
République, December 2015



On March 31st, after a big demonstration in the streets of Paris against the new labour legislation proposed by the government, the place of the Republic was blocked off by thousands of people. The place became a point of daily gathering : every evening since then, there are a big assembly, different commissions and different stands (Press stands, food at free pricing, infirmary, music concerts). Hundreds or thousands people (it depends on the evening) meet to discuss the new labour legislation, their working and living conditions, the current struggles, and numerous subjects (politics, finance, war, migrants, feminism, racism, and ecology for example).

The big assembly is held at 6:00 PM and the place is occupied until midnight approximately. On Saturdays and on Sundays, there are many people on the place all day long and themed discussions are organized.

This event is opened to everyone. Every evening (subway République lines 3, 5, 8, 9, and 11)



Important demonstrations
took place on 9 March, 31
March, 9 April and 28 April
throughout France

.....
Evening Assembly, Place de la
République.



Resistance against the eviction of the encampment rue Pajol, and solidarity demonstration, July, 29th, 2015

FREE LEGAL ADVICES FOR ASYLUM (ASYLUM SEEKERS, REFUGEES)

If you want to know your rights and the process to become asylum seeker in France, you can come to meet us. They will explain you the french laws and how to submit a file.

Theses free legal advices are given in 10 rue Affre à Paris (near the subway La chapelle),

- all monday and wednesday : 2PM to 4:30PM



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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