

Statement in the name of Sud Education - French Guianese section Representing the French SUD Federation at the International Workers Congress, september 2019

I- Our stand on international solidarity issues

The French Guianese section of the French union “SUD”, like its national federation, regards international solidarity among workers, and solidarity between political and industrial organisations worldwide, as a key factor of the fight against capitalism.

In accordance with the charter of Amiens, which states the necessity for activist workers to design a form of union which will be, in the future, the cornerstone of a new social order, we can't imagine building the world of tomorrow on our own. Quite the opposite: we think that there is no future unless organizations working for social progress eventually unite and achieve self-determination. In order to defend the rights of workers, we have to reach out beyond our national borders. Our union strongly believes anti-capitalism and anti-fascism are struggles that must have an international outreach.

Sud éducation Guyane has been committed to these struggles in both South America and the Caribbean, as these two cultural identities meet and merge in French Guiana. We make a point of promoting anti-capitalism and anti-fascism while always keeping our local political and cultural context in mind. We took part in the 2008 World Social Forum in Belem, among the “Solidaire” delegation.

Besides, our union took an active part in the 2017 social protest movement in French Guiana, along the locals, in every city and up to the most remote parts of the territory. Inside the workgroup for education of the KPLD – the Collective for the Emancipation of French Guiana, we consistently advocated our vision of the school system as a powerful tool to emancipate our youth, alongside the representatives of the First Nations and those of the descendants of the victims of the slave trade.

Our stand on the political and economic situation of French Guiana is very clear: we reject its protracted colonial status, and radically and actively oppose the yoke of international capitalism. To this day, French Guiana has been in a position of isolation within the South American continent, both economically and politically. Because of its international borders and of European law, French Guiana cannot get involved in regional cooperation. This condition of estrangement has been imposed on French Guiana by the French government, as well as being the result of global capitalist forces.

French Guiana is, in fact, like a fort used by the European Union to promote and protect its own interest in South America. We don't believe in enlightened nationalism: the idea of nation is a bourgeois invention, whose sole purpose has been to justify asking the Poor to die to preserve the interests of the Rich. We reject the idea of war between the people, and of peace between the classes.

II- The Issue of Border Enforcement

In our experience, the most urgent fight is the fight against xenophobia and the stigmatization of immigrant workers and their families. To that purpose, we were one of the founding members of the Education Without Borders Network, a network which helps children and students to get papers, and also upholds the freedom to circulate and solidarity within the education system.

We fight for the right of all children to go to school regardless of their immigration status, for free education and for progress towards a school system whose only purpose is to emancipate students, while respecting their family culture – by allowing them, for example, to be tutored at school in their native language.

Besides, we reject and fight back commonplace racist prejudices against immigrant workers from neighbouring countries, which picture them as scroungers who come to loot our natural resources and social subsidies.

This caricature doesn't do justice to their working conditions, to the reality of immigration trends, and can only thrive because cultural exchanges with our neighbours are so limited, and because people are so ignorant of the status of workers beyond our borders. Fighting these beliefs is at the core of our commitment to building strong connections with unions in neighbouring countries.

As a teacher's union, we advocate the idea that foreign teachers should be allowed to have TENURE and be protected by the status of civil servant, just like nationals. We defend every worker within the education community, regardless of status, occupation, gender or nationality.

Every year, we organize a training program on emancipatory educational methods, which promote our core value of self-determination.

II- Our Recent Commitments

Our political commitment has gone one step further over the last couple of years. Since 2017, our union has been involved in the fight against the "Montagne d'Or" mega-mining project in western Guiana. This project had been designed by a Russo-Canadian consortium: Columbus Gold and Norgold. We backed First Nations organizations in their restless fight against the exploitation and destruction of the Amazonian forest.

When Jair Bolsonaro was elected in December 2018, we issued a joint statement against his policies, along with two other unions and professional organisations. In a press release directed at international press organs and at our federations, we proclaimed our solidarity with Brazilian unions in the fight against this government's capitalist and fascist discourse and policies. Unfortunately, recent turns of events have proven us right.

For a few months, Sud éducation Guyane has intensified its cooperation with Brazilian unions from the Oiapoque region. In May 2019, an inter-union delegation SNES, SNESUP (pour la FSU) and SUD Education drove to Oiapoque to join the National Rallying in favour of Public Education in Brazil. A ceremony took place before the Marco Zero monument in downtown Oiapoque. University professors, school communities from Oiapoque and from the Amapa state, secondary education students were present.

Our main goal was to show our support to our Brazilian counterparts, and to show our concern in front of those attacks against the state school system by Bolsonaro's government. We emphasised the similarities between the policies enacted by the French and Brazilian governments, which are both inspired by neoliberal and reactionary values. Statements were made and connections were established thanks to this event.

A follow-up meeting took place between the French and Brazilian unions: SINDUFAP section de l'ANDES et SINSEPEAP for Brazil, and SNES SNESUP and SUD Education for France. This meeting proved very encouraging.

We compared the states of the education systems on either side of the border, listed common issues and suggested solutions we could put in place to work together in the future.

On June 1st, we drafted a joint statement, in Brazilian and in French. This statement is to be the cornerstone of our future cooperation. You will find these texts attached below.

In order to make this new partnership more concrete, we plan:

- to organize a two-day conference in Oiapoque in a few weeks
- and to invite our fellow-unionists over to Cayenne for a conference in early 2020, which may include a training program.

We will address issues such as: reforms of the education system in our two countries, the rights of First Nations, vernacular languages, school and upward social mobility...

We have found this partnership to be very exciting, and we are sure it will prove to be fruitful and provide efficient solutions to fight back recent attacks against our common ideal of public education, and to protect our vision of education as a tool to promote social emancipation and social change.

Thanks for listening to us.