

Report from Paris by Christine Bierre

Fraternité, Egalité, 'Get out of here!'

The police storming of a Paris church full of African immigrants is detonating a "hot autumn" in Chirac's face.

At 7:30 a.m. on Aug. 23, some 1,500 policemen stormed the St. Bernard church in Paris, where 200 "undocumented" African immigrants, including several hunger strikers, had sought protection against deportation, in protest against the racist immigration laws of former Interior Minister Charles Pasqua.

The assault is reminiscent of the worst racist attacks by French Algeria partisans against Algerians during that country's independence war: After smashing open the church doors with axes, police brutally made their way through the strike sympathizers sleeping outside and inside the church, clubbing resisters and arresting more than 200, whom they dragged forcibly out of the church. Many will be deported.

The conflict over these "undocumented aliens," started five months ago and has intensified as a result of the government's tough "no negotiations" stance, a purely opportunistic position aimed at appeasing the base of President Jacques Chirac's RPR, who might otherwise be tempted to join Jean Marie Le Pen's racist National Front.

At issue is the racist, arbitrary immigration laws enacted three years ago by then-Interior Minister Pasqua. Those laws overturned France's traditional *jus solis*, which conferred French citizenship to anyone born on French soil. In its place, the *loi Pasqua* allows children born in France of non-citizens to ask for and receive French citizenship, only when they reach their majority, i.e., come of legal age. The

law's ambiguities have led to such absurdities, that some children born in France of foreign parents have been allowed to remain, while their parents have been forced to leave! In addition, under the law, if a foreigner has a work permit, his family may not join him after he has established himself, but can only accompany him when he first arrives, and then only if he has secured housing for them. Nor are residence permits automatically given out to the spouses of French citizens.

The "undocumented aliens" fighting for legal residency against the right-wing RPR regime, have received support from many parties and organizations, from the centrist UDF wing of the present government majority, which used the occasion to make public its disapproval of the President's policies, to the traditional left, including the Socialists and Communists, the major trade unions, and even the extreme left and environmentalists.

But, with the exception of the archbishop of Paris, Cardinal Jean Lustiger, and of former Presidential candidate Jacques Cheminade, none of those supporting the "undocumented aliens" are raising the underlying social and economic questions. Cardinal Lustiger told *Le Figaro* of Aug. 24, that the men "from poor African countries, are hungry to be like us, and sometimes, they are simply hungry."

More broadly, the cardinal located the problem within the relationship of the rich countries toward the poor: Will the former, he asked, "try to defend themselves against something that is presented as an invasion or ag-

gression, with total disregard for moral principles that founded our civilization?" The situation, he said, was being used to manipulate fears among both the French and the immigrants. The real question is one "of the political and economic responsibility of the rich countries: How can one reasonably and generously deal with the economic difficulties of countries in extreme poverty?"

Similarly, LaRouche associate Jacques Cheminade located the solution to the immigration problem in the need to re-launch the productive economy. Once economic growth is re-established in both the North and the South, declared Cheminade, those who will migrate to other countries will do so as a matter of free choice, and not be forced to flee famine and poverty.

The storming of St. Bernard Church has gotten the expected hot autumn of social unrest off to an early start. Demonstrations have occurred nearly on a daily basis since then. The statements by Jacques Chirac and Prime Minister Alain Juppé, issued from the President's vacation home in Bregançon, rejected any essential changes in either the immigration laws or the harsh domestic austerity, and have further fueled social discontent. Farmers, teachers, bank employees, and others are already preparing strikes and demonstrations for the near term. According to a recent poll by *CSA/La Tribune*, 77% of French citizens believe that the strikes will be as strong as those of last December.

Within the right-wing government majority, many, including members of Chirac's RPR party, fear that France is heading for a major "deflationary crisis" and are calling on the government to ease up on monetary rigor before it's too late. Oblivious to all dangers, however, Chirac and Juppé remain at the *Titanic's* helm, sure that they have charted the right course.