

Solidarity with the striking workers of Kazakhstan!

The CGT branch at the state employment agency Pôle emploi in Lorraine region has been in contact with the Kazakh trade union Zhanartu for several years. We had written several letters of protest at the repressive measures which trade unionists and strikers had suffered at the hands of the state and the employers, especially KazMunaiGas in the city of Zhanaosen. But in recent years the social and political situation has seriously deteriorated and repression has dramatically increased, culminating in a literal massacre on the 16th December 2011.

Although these killings were a real shock for the people of Kazakhstan and put an end to the strike of KazMunaiGas employees at Zhanaosen, very soon afterwards the combativity of the workers recovered and in a most decisive way. Enriched by the tragic experience of Zhanaosen, strikes broke out across the country and in some cases these battles were successful. This was the case with the strike by miners working for Kazakhmys in the Karaganda region, where workers won a 100% wage increase after only a few days of strikes, similarly with the workers employed by ArcelorMittal in the town of Termitau.

It was against this terrible background that the CGT branch at Pôle emploi decided to go up a gear in our solidarity action with the Kazakh social movement and the Zhanartu trade union. Last March we voted to put in place a trade union twinning relationship, although we left the format open. We took the opportunity to meet Esenbek Ukteshbaev at Nancy while he was in Western Europe speaking at a series of meetings about the situation in his country at the invitation of several trade union bodies as well as the International Labour Organisation.

The aims of our meeting were to firm up with him our proposal for trade union twinning, and to begin to broaden the French movement of workers' solidarity with Kazakh workers and Zhanartu.

As for trade union twinning we finalised a resolution which calls for:

- The name of our trade union to be added to the list of those supporting the international solidarity campaign 'Campaign Kazakhstan'
- The systematic sending of protest letters to the Kazakh authorities and letters of support to strikers and activists suffering repression
- Dissemination of information about the struggles of the Kazakh workers, and
- Regular financial contributions to Zhanartu

We also decided to continue to broaden solidarity within the wider CGT.

During the two days Esenbek Ukteshbaev was in France we organised a meeting in Mulhouse where he met trade unionists from the CGT-PSA, and a public meeting at the University of Lorraine in Nancy which was attended by the secretary of the UoL CGT branch at Nancy.

For us in the CGT Pôle emploi Lorraine it is important to rediscover the responses of internationalism and workers solidarity which have been forgotten for too long. In particular, at a time of global capitalist crisis, our interests are the same whether we work in France, Kazakhstan, Greece or elsewhere. And it is the best answer when faced with the rise of racism and xenophobia which poisons society and which attempts to insinuate itself into the trade union movement.