

French Guiana: More than 1,000 people attend MPs' call for action

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The space was crowded between the columns bearing the names of the thousands of Guyanese slaves freed in 1848, to attend the meeting of the two MPs for French Guiana. On Saturday 16 September, more than 1,000 people responded to the call from Jean-Victor Castor and Davy Rimane at the Botanical Gardens in Cayenne.

Jean-Victor Castor (MDES candidate) is a former secretary general of the MDES and a former figurehead of the UTG (Union des travailleurs guyanais) in the years 1990-2000. Davy Rimane (LFI candidate) was spokesman and signatory of KPLD (Kolektif pou Lagwiyan dékolé) in 2017 and general secretary of UTG éclairage (EDF) until his election. Both had received the support of Philippe Poutou in the second round in 2022, Castor was then opposed to a Mélenchon-backed candidate, and Rimane opposed the outgoing LREM MP.

For an increase in French Guiana's budget

Since their election, this is the third major meeting organised to tell the Guianan population about the progress and, above all, the difficulties of their exercise in the National Assembly. Yet never before has there been such a large turnout. The aim of the meeting was to begin preparing for an offensive against the French state in the run-up to the next budget vote. The MPs want to significantly increase the allocation to French Guiana to enable the necessary structural and economic catching-up from which the territory suffers so much.

The creation of the university hospital, which should be operational by 2025 (a commitment won during a general strike in 2020 during the covid crisis) is an opportunity to commit the State to building new hospitals in Cayenne and Kourou. Similarly, the demographic boom in French Guiana, which officially passed the 300,000 mark this year, means that a large number of new primary and secondary schools need to be built, and the government needs to make a commitment to match the real needs! Finally, there is a pressing need to build roads to open up the interior of French Guiana, in order to reduce the threat of disruption to territorial continuity, as the bankruptcy of Air Guyane, the only operator to the landlocked communes, sadly reminds us!

Cost-of-living allowance and political demands

An increase in the budget allocated to French Guiana could also make it possible to introduce a cost-of-living allowance for all workers in the public and private sectors. At present, only civil servants, certain contractual civil servants and employees in key sectors such as the space centre and the port benefit from such a bonus. As Davy Rimane pointed out, this measure would enable thousands of workers to gain in "living standards". The cost of living in French Guiana is 40% higher than in France, according to a recent study by INSEE.

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Other historic demands were also put forward, such as the total retrocession of land (95% of the 8 million hectares in French Guiana belong to the State) and political autonomy (the French government is blowing hot and cold on this issue, despite the fact that it is enshrined in the 2017 Guiana agreements), in order to put an end to the "isolation of French Guiana", as Jean-Victor Castor pointed out. Although no date has yet been set, further meetings are expected to take place in order to collectively draw up a list of demands and get the ball rolling in terms of mobilisation and bargaining power with the government. As far as the social forces are concerned, the UTG (Guyana's main trade union centre) has aligned itself with the rally, having called for a massive turnout. It's hard to say at this stage how events will turn out, but the initiative of the Guianan MPs is as original as it is interesting! To be continued...

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