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Systemic Exploitation Unveiled in Bordeaux Vineyards

Immigrant Workers Face Degrading Conditions and False Promises

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The rise in cases of labor abuse in Bordeaux vineyards has revealed a systemic exploitation problem affecting one of the world's most prestigious winemaking regions. In recent months, a series of trials in the Libourne court have exposed practices involving human trafficking, labor abuses, and degrading living conditions, predominantly targeting immigrant workers, many of whom are Moroccan and Romanian.

The first case of the year was reported in July, when two men were jailed for labor exploitation in vineyards. Since then, two additional serious cases have come to light. In October, five Moroccan workers accused the management of La Petite Charentaise, a family business run by Ahmed G., 59, and his son El Medhi G., 28, both of Moroccan origin. The employers face charges including human trafficking, abuse, undeclared employment, embezzlement, and forgery. Over a two-year period, from January 2022 to December 2023, they allegedly deceived workers with false promises of work contracts, residency permits, and housing in exchange for significant sums of money.

Reports indicate that workers paid between 200 and 700 euros monthly, a substantial portion of their income in Morocco. To meet these demands, some relied on loans and family savings. Upon arrival in France, they were forced to work grueling hours with minimal breaks, without receiving the promised wages. The workers described being housed in a 16-square-meter apartment in Libourne, where up to eight people lived in unsanitary conditions without a shower or refrigerator. One worker reportedly slept on a mattress in front of the bathroom.

Although Ahmed and El Medhi denied the allegations, the court found them guilty of most charges. They were sentenced to one year and six months of house arrest, respectively. Prosecutors referred to these incidents as a "real phenomenon" significantly affecting the Libourne region and noted that La Petite Charentaise had applied for work permits for at least 59 employees since 2020.

Another case, brought before the court this month, involves 25 Moroccan workers who reported similar conditions at the company Le Fronsadais Viti. According to the newspaper Sud-Ouest, employees worked up to 62 hours per week over six days, including holidays. Their wages were docked to cover substandard accommodations, where they lived in cramped spaces without heating, on mattresses placed directly on the floor. They had limited bathroom facilities, no hot water, and endured squalid conditions infested with cockroaches.

The trial implicated three individuals: the alleged head of the company, referred to as "Mr. Alain," his wife, who is officially listed as the business owner, and an unidentified third party. The charges include human trafficking, illegal labor, and fraud. The court's

verdict is expected on December 17.

The AFP news agency has reported a rise in labor exploitation in Bordeaux vineyards, particularly targeting immigrant workers. These operations employ tactics similar to those used in migrant trafficking. The Libourne prosecutor's office has prioritized efforts to combat these crimes in the region.

These cases not only highlight the vulnerability and precariousness of migrant workers but also raise concerns about labor practices in an industry globally renowned for its high-quality wines. The situation underscores questions about the role of local authorities and oversight mechanisms in safeguarding workers' rights in Bordeaux.