

Marseille bosses call for army, police to break dockers' strike

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On Sunday Jean-Luc Chauvin, an employers' federation leader, called for the mobilisation of the army and the gendarmerie to clear the blockage by a crane operators' strike of the oil terminals at the port of Fos-Lavéra near Marseille, in southern France.

In a press conference on Monday reported on France 3 regional TV, Chauvin—who is the president of the regional branch of the Medef (Movement of French Enterprises, the main French employers' organisation)—declared, “We are requesting the intervention of law enforcement agencies; we are requesting that the state do what is necessary to open up the port”.

As of this writing, Chauvin's provocative statement has not been widely reported. The CGT (General Confederation of Labour; close to the Communist Party), which controls most of the port workforce has made no public statement.

Chauvin's statements amount to testing the waters, seeing how various sections of the political establishment—including the unions, the media, and petty-bourgeois parties such as the *Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste*—will react to threats of armed action against the workers. That the ruling class resorts to such strategies is a serious warning to all workers.

This is part of a trend throughout Europe. Already the social-democratic government of Greek Prime Minister Giorgios Papandreou used the army in August to break a lorry drivers' strike against austerity measures. The unions and petty-bourgeois ex-left parties capitulated to Papandreou. Greek truck drivers' union President Georgios Tzortzatos told Alter television station, “We are now soldiers of the Greek state and we'll wait to see our orders”.

The Spanish Socialist government of José Luis

Zapatero has threatened to use the army against striking Madrid metro workers and air traffic controllers.

Chauvin's declarations are a sign that the ruling class will also adopt such tactics in wealthier European countries. Chauvin has initiated a campaign group of Marseille bosses called “Hands off my port”. The group has taken out a full-page advertisement in the business daily *Les Echos*, mocking the dockers with an ironical headline declaring they had “The best job in the world”.

The 224 workers at the Fos-Lavéra terminals have been on strike since September 27 against plans to create a separate enterprise for the terminal, at present part of the largely publicly owned Marseille port complex. This is a first step to privatisation.

The rest of the Marseille port workers are also in struggle against pension cuts and the ongoing reform of the ports (See: “Marseille strike hits Mediterranean shipping, oil supplies”)

This is part of the mass movement of strikes and demonstrations of millions of workers and youth against President Nicolas Sarkozy's pension cuts and austerity programme. The cuts will raise the age of retirement from 60 to 62, and the age at which pension rights can be claimed without financial penalties from 65 to 67.

The port strike has had a powerful impact, disrupting oil supplies to Corsica and large parts of southern France, and halting much of the shipping in the western Mediterranean. Reuters has reported that Mediterranean gasoline traders are “struggling to meet long-term supply contracts to Africa and the Middle East.”

Exasperated at the powerful impact of the strike and fearful of rising social opposition, Chauvin launched a scurrilous attack on the crane operators, claiming that they hardly did any work for inflated salaries. He

arrogantly denounced them for insisting on continuing to be able to retire at 55. In fact, polls indicate that 68 percent of the French population support industrial action in defence of pensions.

Chauvin asserted his indignation that workers should dare to challenge the state and the employers: “Pascal Galéoté [the general secretary of the CGT port workers union] is taking hostage a whole part of a whole population of people from Marseille, Provence, Lyon and soon Alsace making this into an oil dispute. He’s trying to force the hand of the state”.



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