

French riot police attack striking ferry seamen and migrants in Calais

Alex Lantier
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The violent suppression Tuesday of a strike by sailors of the MyFerryLink company in Calais by riot police was followed with more police attacks against the 3,000 migrants detained in a camp in Calais as they try to evade law enforcement and reach the UK. Tuesday's events stoked tensions between British and French authorities.

Hundreds of MyFerryLink workers went on strike and protested against the Eurotunnel corporate leadership's threat to transfer two of MyFerryLink's three boats to its Danish competitor, DFDS. MyFerryLink could lose as many as 480 workers, out of a total of 600. Striking seamen blockaded the port of Calais, the Eurostar train tracks that pass under the English Channel, as well as the A16 and A25 highways.

The police chief of the Pas-de-Calais region, Fabienne Buccio, launched a large-scale police intervention to take back control of the city and crush the mobilization around 10:30 a.m. Tuesday. The security forces, which are present in force in Calais due to the extensive surveillance deployments targeting the migrant camp, violently attacked the striking workers.

An online video shows security forces spraying pepper spray over a group of striking sailors who are sitting on a highway and singing the French national anthem, *La Marseillaise*.

Confrontations between the sailors and CRS riot police throughout the town left at least two strikers injured and taken to the hospital for treatment. A squad of 50 CRS firing tear gas grenades, dispersed 200 protesters on the Eurostar train tracks, between the Fréthun train station and the entrance of the tunnel under the Channel.

With police largely occupied attacking the protesting sailors, some migrants tried to slip into trucks traveling

towards the UK, which were caught in traffic jams in the highways around Calais.

The CRS, who routinely assault the Calais migrants to prevent them from boarding vehicles bound for the UK, then intervened to search the trucks and arrest migrants hidden there.

The social eruption in Calais also heightened tensions between the UK and France over the handling of the migrants trapped in Calais.

The British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) issued a travel warning to British citizens in France. Brandishing the threat of "terrorism" linked to the Islamic State, it added: "There are large numbers of illegal migrants in and around Calais, who may seek to enter the UK illegally. Although local police patrols have been reinforced, you should keep vehicle doors locked in slow moving traffic and secure your vehicle when it is left unattended."

The day before, Natacha Bouchart, Calais' right-wing mayor, had appeared on France Inter radio to call upon the French government to organize a "diplomatic incident" with London to force British authorities to help Calais deal with the rising number of migrants. "Great Britain is not doing its part for Europe, it does not give a penny" to help with the migrant crisis, she said.

She also complained that the French state is not helping Calais improve the appalling conditions facing migrants in their provisional camp, in order to avoid a broader movement of public opinion in favor of the immigrants. "We should have very rapidly installed humanitarian tents," she said. "When I asked the Interior Ministry about this, I was told that we had to avoid actions that would set something off."

The British ambassador to France, Sir Peter Ricketts, replied to Bouchart Tuesday in the pages of the *Voix du*

Nord newspaper. He said, “We have put 15 million euros on the table to improve the security and fluidity of the port, with the installation of security barriers.” Asked about a potential British contribution to the upkeep of the immigrant detention camp, he replied: “We are working closely with local authorities, but security in the city remains the responsibility of French authorities.”

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Yesterday, assistant Calais mayor Philippe Mignonet called for pushing the British border to the other side of the Channel tunnel, so that migrants would arrive and cluster on British soil, rather than in Calais.

The class conflict in Calais and the persecution of the migrants by French and British authorities are a microcosm of the internal tensions tearing at European capitalism. The ruling elites find no other solution to the current crisis than stimulating national chauvinism and organizing naked repression by security forces. These are directed in the first instance against migrants, but in the event of serious social conflict, they mobilize against the working class as a whole.

The Calais migrants are the victims of the reactionary barriers to freedom of movement imposed by British law and the laws of the Schengen zone on the European continent. Having fled African and Middle Eastern countries devastated by the wars or client regimes of the imperialist powers, they are forced to remain for months or years in makeshift tents without plumbing or heating.

If the French state has recently announced plans to spend a half-million euros on building limited sanitary infrastructure at the detention camp, it is largely due to the concerns of the French police themselves. Recently, at least two cases of tuberculosis were found among the CRS riot police who are carrying out the repression of the migrants. In the meantime, the migrants are still trapped in the camp with nowhere to go, except to try to evade French law enforcement and arrive undetected in the UK.

As for the sailors, Buccio’s operation underlines that the state will not tolerate any action by the working class that threatens to block the policy of wage and job cuts carried out by the employers, the French Socialist Party (PS) government and the European Union.

The European bourgeoisie depends above all on the

union bureaucracies and their political allies, all tied to the PS, to smother rising anger in the working class, as they did by isolating the Calais strike. Opposition to capitalist austerity and the persecution of refugees is above all a political struggle that entails a confrontation with the state. Such a struggle requires a mobilization of the working class independent of the organizational and political influence of the union bureaucracies.



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