

Striking cashiers and dockers interrogated under French state of emergency

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The summoning of dockers and of cashiers of the Casino store chain for interrogation by the gendarmerie triggered a one-day strike in the port of Marseille at the end of February. It is a warning that the state will attack workers even when they strike on limited demands at their workplaces.

Strike action began in November, as nine workers at a Casino store in Port Saint Louis demanded the extension of three short-term contracts until Christmas, the replacement of another worker, and an increase in their working hours from 30 to 36 hours per week. The strike lasted two months, the longest of any strike at the Casino chain.

In an unprecedented move, the gendarmerie at Port Saint Louis interrogated the nine workers and the national delegate of the Stalinist General Confederation of Labor (CGT) union for Casino. The Casino store's manager had filed a complaint for aggravated theft and occupation of the workplace during the strike, and also for "blocking and threatening freedom to work in a coordinated fashion."

This complaint is a direct and extraordinary threat against the constitutionally-protected right to strike, facilitated by the hysterical atmosphere the Socialist Party (PS) is promoting under the state of emergency. As for the charge of aggravated theft—based on the disappearance of one packet each of M&M's, potato chips, and Kinder chocolates—it is a provocation against the strikers.

The PS government of President François Hollande has exploited the reactionary state of emergency it imposed after the November 13 terror attacks in Paris to ban protests and public gatherings, carry out mass extrajudicial searches and seizures, and eviscerate democratic rights. These measures are aimed not at Islamist terrorist groups, which the NATO powers in

fact use to carry out their war for regime change in Syria. Rather, it is aimed at intimidating workers and trying to block opposition to the PS's reactionary policies.

A few days after the Casino workers were interrogated, three port workers including two dockers were interrogated for two hours on charges of "jointly committing voluntary acts of violence" against Casino management during the strike.

The CGT port union in Marseille protested the summoning of the three port workers, calling a 24-hour strike and a protest in front of the police commissariat that was attended by 2,000 workers. A delegation of port workers was allowed to enter into the commissariat and listen to the interrogations.

CGT officials demanded the canceling of the summons, noting they were on "false and ridiculous charges" and denouncing "trade union discrimination and attacks on the CGT."

Workers should be warned that the CGT and other trade union bureaucracies will not struggle against either the state of emergency or the criminalisation of workers' opposition to big business and the PS. The defense of the cashiers and of the port workers requires a broader mobilisation of workers, not only against Casino and the interrogation, but against the state of emergency and the PS's reactionary policies.

The CGT has supported Hollande's imposition of a state of emergency, and the CGT-linked Left Front voted outright for the state of emergency in the National Assembly, trampling democratic rights underfoot.

The interrogation of CGT delegates does not signify an attempt to crush the CGT bureaucracy, which has long played an essential role in organizing the orderly enforcement of austerity policies and mass sackings in

work places. In the Marseille port, the CGT constantly divides different sections of the work force and plays them against each other, while threatening workers that it considers too militant.

Nevertheless, as it faces a profound global economic crisis and rising social anger among workers, the state aims to discipline even more firmly bureaucracies that are proven tools of the established social order. It wants to show that any struggle will be severely punished. It aims thus to intimidate the workers and to discourage any union official tempted to let off steam at his work place by organizing a protest from doing so, if this protest is considered ill-timed by management or the state.

The cashiers and port workers are not yet clear of all accusations from the justice system. Based on what has occurred to other strikers attacked by the courts during the state of emergency, such as the Goodyear and Air France workers, it must be assumed that the unions will do nothing to ensure the broad mobilisation necessary to defend them.



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