

Workers speak on police crackdown against oil protest in France

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Around 4:30 a.m. Tuesday morning, French state security police (CRS) intervened to dislodge 200 demonstrators blockading oil depots and the Esso refinery in Marseille. The blockade had been initiated at the call of the General Workers' Confederation (CGT), during the night from Sunday to Monday, to protest the forced passage of the El Khomri law. This has provoked a shortage of diesel oil in the Marseille region.

The CGT federal secretary of the oil industry, Emmanuel Lépine, said, "Nearly 40 riot police (CRS) vehicles cleared the roadblock the CGT activists had erected. The local union secretary and the departmental union were sequestered for at least two hours in the local union of Fos sur Mer."

Demonstrators spoke of a "war scene." One worker told a WSWs reporter, "They intervened with ramming a truck that was followed by using a water cannon against us. The riot police came from everywhere; they encircled us. They launched tear gas without warning and at close range. There were dozens of tear gas grenades flying above us. Some people were hit with police batons. A helicopter flew above us to assist their guys. We threw stones at the riot police to defend ourselves."

According to the witnesses, demonstrators were deliberately directed towards the offensive of the riot police, in the union centre located near the blockage of the oil depots. After 50 demonstrators took refuge in the local union (UL), the CRS threw tear gas in the room and waited for the protesters to leave the building. The police force assault against the demonstrators ended at about 6 a.m.

Among the demonstrators were dockworkers as well as students. There were injuries on both sides. There were some arrests among the protesters. Discussions

took place between the security forces and the CGT to release those arrested.

The CGT blocked all Marseille port terminals until 9 a.m. Monday to protest against the arrests. A general meeting organized by the CGT ports was held to call for a strike on Thursday and Friday and, beginning June 1, an indefinite strike to pressure the government.

One port worker told the WSWs, "This is what we need, but it will be difficult. The former union leaders told us that we should put two or three months of salary aside in case of a conflict. Now one cannot get by with a long strike; one is quickly taken by the throat."

In response to the brutality of the riot police, six refineries in the Marseille region have called a strike, along with the oil terminal of Le Havre. The CEO of Total, Patrick Pouyanne, said it would "seriously reconsider" its investment projects in France.

The CRS were stationed at the entrances of various oil depots and refineries in the Marseille region to try to deter any blocking action. The armoured trucks of the riot police are still visible on the roundabouts near the refineries, where they are monitoring passing vehicles.



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