

French police round up refugees in Calais

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On July 2, after the bulldozing of the makeshift shelters of a refugee camp on May 28, two hundred CRS riot police rounded up some 600 refugees in Calais, who were trying to find a way to cross the Channel to England.

They used tear gas and pepper spray on the refugees and immigrants' rights activists, while also targeting journalists to prevent them from filming their actions. Over 15 coaches were on hand to take the refugees away. Equipment provided to the migrants by activists was seized and destroyed.

The operation was reportedly launched at the request of Calais' right-wing mayor, Natacha Bouchart of the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP). *La Voix du Nord* reported on July 3 that 270 adults are being processed in detention centres as far away as Paris and Rennes, and 121 children have been taken to reception centers while 219 were still being held on the tarmac of a disaffected dock known as Camp Salam. Some 600 had regrouped after May 28, where a food distribution area had been set up by refugee support groups. They slept on the ground without cover, with just one tap providing non-drinkable water.

The estimated 1,400 refugees around Calais, largely from Syria, Afghanistan and Eritrea, are fleeing ethnic strife and wars instigated, since the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, by Western imperialism with the participation of French governments—including the present Socialist Party (PS) administration of President François Hollande and Prime Minister Manuel Valls.

It reportedly takes on average eight months for a Syrian or Afghan migrant to reach Calais, traveling through Turkey, Greece, Albania, Croatia and Italy. Migrants brave innumerable perils, not the least the EU's Frontex border agency, whose blocking of access to Europe has brought about the horrific deaths of thousands trying to cross the Mediterranean (see: Dozens of refugees suffocate in boat off the coast

of Italy). Having arrived, the €1,000 they have brought to pay for a clandestine crossing is often stolen by the mafia.

Conditions for migrants in Calais have deteriorated catastrophically since 2002, when Sarkozy, then Minister of the Interior, closed the Red Cross centre at Sangatte sheltering some 1,000 refugees. They have further deteriorated under the present PS administration.

Eight refugees are known to have died this year while attempting to cross the Channel. *Rue89* cited the case of a migrant, aged 50, who left behind his wife and sons in Kunar province in Afghanistan. At the beginning of May, "a policeman broke his nose with a single kick, he said ... there are many migrants who wear bandages on their arms and legs because of fractures caused by telescopic batons."

John was refused treatment at the local hospital and only when accompanied by an activist did a doctor agree to treat him.

Jamal from Jalalabad, Afghanistan tells of a Calais policeman nicknamed "Batista," after the Brazilian footballer, because of his ferocious left foot kicks, and of a woman police officer nicknamed "Madame Natacha" because of her slaps designed to provoke migrants into a reaction so they can be charged for assaulting a policeman. Jamal said: "Your police are just like at home, only they don't have beards."

In the far-right climate stoked by the PS' anti-immigrant policies and persecution of the Roma, migrants are increasingly the targets of attack. One was killed with a hunting rifle near Calais in February. Adam, a Sudanese man of 45, was shot in the back by a suspected far-right Identitaire member on the night of June 17-18.

The attempts by Calais Socialist Party (PS) and Communist Party (PCF) representatives in *La Voix du Nord* to distance themselves from the CRS' July 2

assault on the refugees is deeply hypocritical.

The PS is carrying out mass deportations of the Roma, beefing up police, and pushing through anti-immigrant policies virtually indistinguishable from those of ex-President Nicolas Sarkozy of the UMP. The national PS authorities did nothing to stop the raid or criticise it. The assault in Calais shows that the response of the PS and its pseudo-left allies to their defeats in the municipal and European elections this spring, and the rise of the neo-fascist National Front (FN) is to turn even more sharply to the right.

Local PS legislator Yann Capet cynically praised Valls' proposal to detain migrants in houses as a step forward. According to Capet, Valls' "idea of houses for migrants ... means proposing a worthy, humane welcome."

Having praised various PS detention schemes as "humane," he promptly contradicted himself, claiming: "My fear is that the [migrant] support organisations might get discouraged. Because the little humanity that the migrants get comes from them."

Jacky Hénin, a Communist Party town councillor and mayor of Calais from 2000 to 2008, also cynically complained that Valls had not acted on his proposition of creating "houses for migrants."

The PCF had run the town for 37 years before losing to the UMP in the 2008 municipal elections and again this year. It has been in coalitions nationally and locally with the PS since the 1981 election, which brought the PS, led by François Mitterrand, to power with PCF support. The cuts they pushed through devastated the working class, in particular in the North region around Calais, which was devastated by plant and mine closures.



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