

Online video exposes French police violence against migrants in Calais

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21 May 2015

A video, filmed on May 5 on the outskirts of the northern French city of Calais by the Calais Migrant Solidarity (CMS) group, exposes police brutality against migrants.

The two-minute video, uploaded by CMS on May 10th, shows several sequences of CRS riot police violently pulling and kicking migrants to prevent them from hiding on trucks bound, via ferry, for the UK. At one point, police are also seen spraying migrants by the roadside with what appears to be tear gas. The video shows several scenes of police insulting and attacking migrants, all recorded in just one day.

Calais has become a hub for thousands of desperate migrants, mainly from Africa and the Middle East, who are crossing Europe to seek refuge in the UK. Numbers have surged since spring 2014 as more people flee imperialist wars and repressive regimes in Syria, Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan. However, authorities on both sides of the English Channel are blocking their onward travel from Calais to Britain.

Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve had visited Calais the day before the video was filmed, to urge refugees to seek asylum in France, whose immigration policies he called “humane”. Calling Calais “a laboratory for the best that the Republic can create,” he demanded that the migrants give up their plans to emigrate to the UK. “We must make them understand clearly that asylum in France offers the best chance for them,” he said.

The conditions and police treatment of the migrants, most of whom are fleeing war and repression, are worsening. Police are forcing them to relocate to a new camp on the edge of the city, which one humanitarian organisation described as “the worst in Europe”.

The migrants are sleeping rough in an open-air

shantytown known as the “new jungle” after authorities pushed them from the city centre to a patch of wasteland seen as a “tolerated zone”.

Already in January 2015, international rights group Human Rights Watch (HRW) published a report accusing French police of routinely abusing migrants in Calais. The report was based on interviews with dozens of migrants. It accused the French authorities of not doing much to protect migrants against “harassment and abuse at the hands of French police.”

“They spray you [with pepper-spray] like you’re an insect. It’s happened to all of us in the street,” one of the interviewees told HRW. HRW also produced a video of some of their interviews, with migrants showing their cut and bruised faces and arms in slings.

French police told HRW they were unaware of any accusations of abuse, however, and Cazeneuve defended police in the aftermath of the HRW report. In a press release, he declared that “the security forces, in Calais and elsewhere, carry out their difficult mission with courage, devotion, and the respect of Republican values. In return, they deserve the respect of our fellow citizens.”

After the posting of the CMS video, police sources told AFP that a special investigations unit is now looking into the video, adding that “any violation of the rules will be punished.” Meanwhile, Ludovic Hochart, a spokesman for the UNSA-Police union, questioned the way the video had been edited.

The Calais video is a political exposure of France’s Socialist Party (PS) government. Like the Conservative government across the Channel in Britain, it is attacking and escalating violence against migrants. Seeking to divert popular opposition to austerity policies and imperialist wars into right-wing channels, the European bourgeoisie as a whole relies ever more

on police and far-right forces.

The PS is in particular seeking to integrate the far-right National Front (FN) as a mainstream political party and encourage anti-immigrant hatred, to shift the political atmosphere far to the right and to cover up President François Hollande's disastrous record on jobs.

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Border police in southeastern France have stepped up checkpoints to tackle the growing numbers of presumed immigrants arriving in the country, and the PS is giving a blank check for escalating police brutality in Calais.

While Calais itself has been governed by the conservative Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) since 2008, the region is increasingly a bastion of the neo-fascists. The PS and its ally, the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF), had long controlled the region, but voters are turning against them after decades of mass layoffs, industrial decline, and official corruption.

FN leader Marine Le Pen came in first in the European parliamentary elections in the North region of France, where Calais is located, with 33.6 percent of the vote. This was the biggest gain for the FN and well above its 25 percent score across France as a whole.



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