

French police launch demolition of “Jungle” refugee camp in Calais

Kumaran Ira, Alex Lantier
25 October 2016

Yesterday, 1,250 riot police backed up by over 2,000 other security forces surrounded the “Jungle” refugee camp in Calais, France and began to forcibly expel its residents and destroy the camp.

The operation had started the night before. Police wearing armor and armed with shields and batons surrounded and marched around the camp, which houses 7,000 refugees fleeing impoverished, war-torn countries of Africa, Asia and the Middle East and trying to reach Britain.

In the early morning, police fired tear gas to crush protests that erupted as dozens of refugees lit fires and tried to fight off the security forces, throwing rocks and bottles. Thousands of refugees were then herded into processing zones, many with only light jackets or sandals to wear despite the cold, to be loaded onto buses and transferred to so-called Orientation and Greeting Centers (CAO) across France.

By the end of the day, according to Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve, police had taken 1,918 refugees out of the refugee camp, loaded onto 45 buses.

This is only the prelude to an all-out assault to crush the resistance of those refugees, including women and children, who intend to remain in the camp to the end, to keep trying to reach Britain. *Le Monde* wrote, “When, on Thursday or Friday, all the volunteer migrants will have taken the bus, only the recalcitrant ones will remain. ‘Then, we will be finished with the humanitarian operation,’ said one official. The police operation will begin.”

With unparalleled cynicism, France’s Socialist Party (PS) government is hailing the police assault on the “Jungle” and the forcible deportation of refugees to CAOs as a “humanitarian” operation. In fact, it is a drastic attack on fundamental democratic rights to asylum that has long been demanded by the neo-fascist

National Front (FN).

The operation, Cazeneuve said, would “provide shelter to those who can justifiably obtain refugee status in France and who should not be in a precarious, vulnerable situation in Calais, in the hands of people traffickers who are real actors of the trade in human beings.”

State authorities brought in hundreds of journalists to give wall-to-wall coverage of the police operation that focused on the busing, while keeping silent on the police assaults and echoing PS claims that it is a “humanitarian” enterprise.

The Pas-de-Calais police prefecture’s press release stated, “Over 700 journalists are now accredited. They can rely on the services of the Pas-de-Calais prefecture, who are doing their best to reconcile journalists’ ability to report on the operation and the continuation of the operation itself, in the interests of the migrants.”

The PS’s claim that the assault on the “Jungle” aims to protect refugees is an odious political lie. Together with the British government, which refuses to admit most of the refugees, it is carrying out a drastic attack on democratic rights. The anti-refugee operation aims to divide the workers with the anti-immigrant hatreds that the ruling class is stoking across Europe, and to appeal to the only social base the PS retains after being discredited by its policies of austerity and war—namely, the police.

Despite the appalling conditions that prevailed in the “Jungle,” where refugees were forced to live in tents and with minimal resources, they will face even more difficult and uncertain conditions once they are scattered across hundreds of tiny camps in villages and towns across France.

The UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) stressed that the estimated 1,200 children in the

“Jungle” will be at risk from the clearing of the camp. UNHCR spokesman Adrian Edwards said aid to those displaced by the operation was vital, so “that children don’t move on to other destinations and risk becoming exploited by human traffickers or end up living in the streets without any support.” He stressed the need to reunite children with any relatives now living in Europe.

At the request of the French police, British authorities cut off even the trickle of admissions of refugees into Britain as the assault on the “Jungle” began. In recent days, around 200 children had been brought to Britain, including 60 girls.

“Due to planned operational activity in Calais, and at the request of the French authorities, we have reluctantly agreed that the transfer process will be temporarily paused,” a British Home Office spokesman said.

The closure of the “Jungle” is part of a reactionary European Union (EU) policy of closing its borders and denying asylum to the tens of millions of people who are fleeing imperialist wars and ethnic conflict in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Sudan and beyond. This has led to thousands of deaths, as refugees piled into unseaworthy ships drowned in the Mediterranean—an outcome EU officials tacitly welcome, insofar as they have declared that refugee deaths could dissuade others from attempting the journey.

The significance of this barbaric policy goes beyond the number of refugees who have died, or who are being deported from Calais. As the European imperialist powers escalate their participation in unpopular US-led wars across the Middle East, they are massively building up police powers at home. Nowhere is this more obvious than France, where the PS has imposed a state of emergency after terror attacks carried out in Paris by Islamist networks mobilized in NATO’s war in Syria.

While refugees, immigrants and Muslims are currently the main target of the police in France, the central target is the working class. Already, masses of French youth and workers were targeted in brutal assaults by riot police when they protested the PS’s reactionary labor law this spring.

A central component of this political offensive is the PS’s promotion of neo-fascism’s historical legacy and political program. After trying to inscribe in the

constitution the principle of deprivation of nationality—the legal pretext for the deportation of Jews from Nazi-Occupied France in World War II, long defended only by the far right—the PS recently adopted another FN proposal, to create a National Guard. Its purpose, ominously, is to assist the army in military operations on French soil.

Now, the PS is adopting another longstanding FN demand: the closure of refugee camps housing refugees trying to reach Britain in northern France. Yesterday, the FN supported the assault on the “Jungle” but demanded that the PS expel the refugees. “The solution is not distributing them among smaller camps, it’s expulsion,” said FN official Nicolas Bay. “We should above all keep them from coming in before we prevent them from leaving to go to England.”

It will not be long before the PS or its successor again turns the police apparatus against opposition in the working class to social austerity and war. It doubtless hopes that, by giving the police free rein for a reactionary assault on defenseless refugees in Calais, it will further strengthen them for their next attack against refugees, or against social protests by workers and youth at home.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact