

Violent police attack on anti-oil pipeline protest in North Dakota

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More than 300 riot police from five states and National Guard troops were deployed Thursday against anti-pipeline protesters in Cannon Ball, North Dakota, violently arresting 141 protesters camped near Highway 1806. The protesters, most of them Native American, are opposed to the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL), which will transport oil produced in North Dakota to Illinois.

The police were supported by all-terrain vehicles, mine-resistant ambush protected (MRAP) vehicles, Humvees, helicopters, and at least one sound cannon. They attacked protesters with batons, pepper spray, stun guns, concussion grenades, and bean bag rounds, killing at least one horse.

Police from North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, Wyoming, and Nebraska were deployed under the Emergency Management Assistance Compact, an interstate agreement passed under the Clinton administration that allows states to share law enforcement resources during a state of emergency. North Dakota has been under a state of emergency since the beginning of September, declared by Republican Governor Jack Dalrymple in response to the anti-DAPL demonstrations. This is only the second time that EMAC has been invoked for protests. The first was in 2015 in Baltimore, Maryland, during the citywide protests against the police murder of Freddie Gray.

The 1851 Oceti Sakowin Treaty camp, as it is named by protesters, was set up directly in the planned path of the controversial Dakota Access Pipeline. The Sioux claim that the camp, set up by protesters on Sunday, lies on unceded territory that, in violation of the treaty, was illegally sold to the pipeline company, Dakota Access LLC.

The \$3.8 billion pipeline will traverse four states,

transporting up to 570,000 barrels of crude oil a day from the Bakken Shale field in North Dakota to existing pipelines in Illinois. Protesters say that the pipeline will endanger the water supplies of 17 million Americans, and that construction has already destroyed 380 Native American cultural sites. The company that owns the pipeline, Energy Transfer Partners, has been responsible for more than 200 recorded pipeline leaks since 2010. On October 20, a pipeline managed by its subsidiary in Pennsylvania burst, spilling 55,000 gallons of gasoline into the Susquehanna River and threatening the water supplies of thousands of people.

Police were bused in early Thursday morning, approaching the campsite in a tightly-knit horseshoe formation, tearing down tipis, tents, and other improvised structures. Police targeted medics, snatching aid supplies from them and dragging them away from their aid vehicles. One medic was dragged out of her car, marked with a red cross, while she was driving. Another protester had to jump into the car to stop it from hitting other people.

“They [pepper] sprayed me with my hands up and my back to them, with all my medic markings clearly showing,” said a medic from the Standing Rock Medic & Healer Council. “They sprayed me head to toe. We saw that the shooter at the top of the MRAP had a silencer on his assault rifle. If they’re here for peace, if they’re not here for trickery, why do they have silencers on their weapons? We saw them shoot numerous beanbag rounds out of shotguns, they pointed shotguns at me. They pointed shotguns at my back while I was treating patients.”

One man who was dressed as a protester drove through a barricade in a truck owned by a subsidiary of the company that owns the DAPL, fired three rounds from his rifle into the air, then fled into Cannonball

River. He was captured by Bureau of Indian Affairs officers and turned over to the FBI.

The Morton County Sheriff's Office claims that an elderly Native American woman with a prayer staff fired a handgun at police three times, though nobody was hit. "They [the police] used extreme force and tear gas against people who were praying," Loren Bagola told the *Bismarck Tribune*. Protesters who were gathered in prayer on the road and in nearby sweat lodges were confronted and violently arrested by police. Native American groups are reporting confiscations of sacred items, including altar items, staves, and tobacco pipes.

The standoff lasted five hours. Retreating protesters were driven back a mile down the highway and erected a large burning blockade in front of a bridge, preventing police from moving further.

Police officials threatened protesters with the use of force just a day before the crackdown. Cass County Sheriff Paul Laney claimed, "It's not going to be aggression—it's going to be enforcing the rule of law." Morton County Sheriff Kyle Kirchmeier said that the protesters' actions "forced law enforcement to respond" by endangering public safety.

Gov. Dalrymple praised the raid on the camp, saying, "This situation has been well handled from start to finish. Going forward, hopefully we have persuaded protesters that public roadways and private property is not the place to hold a protest." He blamed the protest demonstrations on "agitators from other areas of the country." Since he became governor in 2010, North Dakota's oil and gas pipeline and rail capacity have doubled from 500,000 barrels a day to one million barrels.

The charges against the protesters arrested Thursday include engaging in a riot, maintaining a public nuisance, and conspiracy to endanger others by fire and explosion. 260 other arrests have been made since mid-August, including of journalist Amy Goodman, who documented the use of attack dogs against protesters by private security companies hired by Dakota Access. Dozens of heavily-armed riot police with armored vehicles were also stationed around the courthouse where Goodman's hearing was held on October 17. District Judge John Grinstainer dismissed the charges against Goodman.

The leaders of the protests have worked to confine the

demonstrations within the limits of protest politics, directing appeals to the state, the Obama administration, and the Democratic Party as a whole. David Archambault II, chairman of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe, called on "the state of North Dakota to oversee the actions of local law enforcement" and on the Department of Justice to send "overseers" to ensure the protection of the First Amendment. The Democrats, on their part, have sought to defuse the protests by calling for a temporary cessation of the DAPL's construction and deploying Reverend Jesse Jackson to speak at the 1851 Treaty Camp.

The Standing Rock tribe sent ten youths to deliver a letter to the headquarters of Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign in New York City yesterday. Clinton has the formal endorsement of 30 major tribal leaders, including Archambault and eight other Sioux tribe leaders throughout the Dakotas. The youths were accompanied to the building by two dozen local supporters. After fifteen minutes, the demonstrators were forced by police to leave or face arrest.

The letter was finally picked up by a campaign worker after the demonstrators left. The Clinton campaign then issued a mealy-mouthed statement, its first statement on the DAPL at all, begging for "all parties involved"—including armed mercenaries, private energy companies, and police departments armed with the tools of war—to "find a path forward that serves the broadest public interest."



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