

Violent arrests as police begin evacuating Dakota Access Pipeline protest camp

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Riot police began violently arresting the remaining Dakota Access Pipeline protesters in the Oceti Sakowin Camp, following yesterday's eviction deadline set by North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum.

The first arrests occurred a few hours after the 2:00 pm deadline. Police rushed and tackled unarmed protesters and independent journalists, then retreated down the road, only to rush at protesters again. Eric Poemz, one of those attacked, was slammed onto the ground by the police, injuring his left hip and rendering him unable to walk.

The police presence was ramped up in the week leading to the February 22 deadline. Planes and helicopters owned by the pipeline company, carrying police, have been constantly surveilling the camp from only a few hundred feet in the sky. Supplies and sanitation services to the camp have been cut off by roadblocks and checkpoints set up by the police February 15.

The Oceti Sakowin Camp lies in the path of the nearly completed \$3.78 billion oil pipeline, on land afforded to the Sioux tribe in the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty. Construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) is expected to be completed by March 6. The pipeline will transport up to 570,000 barrels of crude oil across four states, crossing both the nearby Ogallala Aquifer and the Missouri River.

Protesters from the Standing Rock Sioux tribe and environmental activists fear that a leak would threaten the drinking supplies of 17 million people. The company that owns the pipeline, Energy Transfer Partners, has been responsible for at least 200 recorded pipeline leaks since 2010.

Governor Burgum and the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), which oversees the construction of the pipeline, ordered the evacuation on

the pretext of public safety concerns relating to springtime flooding and rubbish left behind by protesters following hasty evacuations ordered by the previous governor last December.

National Guard troops, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) agents and riot police from Wisconsin and other states were deployed ahead of the deadline to assist the Morton County Sheriff's Department. The remaining few hundred protesters in the camp risk fines of up to \$5,000 and prison sentences of up to six months.

The North Dakota state legislature recently passed bills to criminalize the anti-DAPL protests, making it a crime to gather on "public safety zones" determined by the governor. The bills also grant police more freedom to designate a protest as a riot, the incitement of which carries up to 20 years in prison.

The Trump administration has escalated the persecution of the anti-DAPL protesters, with the Department of Justice drawing up arrest warrants against protesters and their attorneys. The administration has also fast-tracked construction of the pipeline with an executive order from Trump scuttling any further environmental reviews by the USACE.

Trump has packed his cabinet with CEOs and other individuals with close ties to the energy industry. Yesterday, more than 7,500 emails were released revealing that Trump's recently-confirmed head of the Environmental Protection Agency, Scott Pruitt, collaborated intimately with energy industry executives to challenge environmental regulations during his tenure as the attorney general of Oklahoma.

Though the Trump administration has deployed an additional 60 BIA agents to the camp, North Dakota's governor and local police are pushing for a further escalation in federal intervention. "We're getting nothing again," said Cass County Sheriff Paul Laney.

The protests in North Dakota won wide popular support last year, with tens of thousands of participating in demonstrations in the US and internationally, and thousands of others gathering at protest camps throughout North Dakota. The protests spread almost entirely through social media amidst a rising wave of police violence and attacks on the living conditions of the working class.

Since protests began last summer, there have been nearly 700 arrests. Almost two hundred protesters were injured in police raids on the camp last winter, with police firing lead-filled beanbags and concussion grenades, and using water canno in sub-freezing temperatures.

The actions taken now by the Trump administration are the culmination of the strategy of the political establishment as a whole. In the summer and fall of last year, the Obama administration stood by as police attacked protesters. In September, the administration and the Army Corps of Engineers issued a temporary stay on construction. In December, after the US elections, the administration halted the project pending an additional environmental review.

This was a maneuver aimed at passing off final action on construction to the incoming Trump administration, which had already made clear that it would act quickly to remove any constraints. Earlier this month, the US Army Corps of Engineers announced that it would grant easement to ETP to finish construction, which was followed rapidly by the moves of the state government to shut down the protests.

Throughout this process, the tribal leadership has worked to smother social opposition to the pipeline, for months fostering illusions in the Obama administration. Since last December, the Standing Rock Sioux tribe has urged protesters to abandon the protest camps, as Chairperson Dave Archambault II launched numerous attempts to negotiate with the incoming Trump administration.

“I want to help him make this nation great again, and I want to help give him assistance, advice on how we can do that together and not leave the first occupants of this land behind,” Archambault said to *E&E News* on December 13, ahead of a meeting between Standing Rock representatives and Trump’s transition team. “We can do the pipelines, we can do oil development, energy development, but not off our backs again.

That’s basically all I would share with him.”

Since the beginning of December, shares in ETP have risen more than 16 percent in anticipation of the payout to come from completion of the pipeline.



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