

French government launches brutal attack on environmental protest camp

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On Monday morning the National Gendarmerie, France's militarized police, deployed nearly 2,500 heavily armed officers to brutally attack an environmentalist camp in Notre-Dame-des-Landes near the city of Nantes. Scenes resembling civil war unfolded as bulldozers and armored vehicles moved into the camp to destroy a colony of about 100 huts and makeshift homes that protesters and farmers have built since they set up the camp 10 years ago.

By mid-morning some 10 huts had been destroyed, along with a watchtower erected by the activists to guard their site, regional security official Nicole Klein told the media. Six people living in one of the shelters were evicted, she said, claiming that they had refused an offer by the government to be rehoused. While journalists were banned from the site when the operation began, videos give an impression of the scale and brutality of the operation to clear out the camp.

The anarchist farmers and activists, called "zadistes" in France, set up the camp in 2008 to block the construction of an international airport to serve the Atlantic coast. The site had been earmarked for a new airport nearly five decades ago, before the French government finally abandoned plans to construct the controversial hub earlier this year. The government of French President Emmanuel Macron argued that since the decision had been taken to drop the plans to build the airport, the "zadistes" (from Zone to Defend or ZAD) had to leave.

Less than two hours after the official start of the evacuation of Notre-Dame-des-Landes, French Interior Minister Gerard Collomb went on air to defend the operation. On Europe1, he declared that after the announcement to halt the airport project, the government wanted "life in this sector to return to normal." Pledging "to reinstate the law" he threatened:

"Authority must reign everywhere, the law must be respected everywhere."

There would be no arrests, "except for those who commit acts of rebellion," Collomb threatened. He said it would be impossible to know how long the operation will last, and that police would operate "as long as it is necessary" to prevent new occupations. "I hope that within a few weeks, order will be restored to Notre-Dame-des-Landes."

The violent assault and the threats by Collomb come amid a rising strike and protest movement throughout the country. Yesterday the French rail strike entered its fourth day, bringing around 80 percent of trains to a halt. Today one in four flights at Air France will be canceled due to a pilot strike. Students who are occupying universities all over France have been calling for a "day of action" to denounce Macron's plans to restructure the universities along neo-liberal lines.

The protests in France are part of a broader international upsurge of the class struggle. In Germany public sector workers are on strike for higher wages and better working conditions today. Lufthansa alone has been forced to cancel 800 flights. In the US the strike by tens of thousands of Oklahoma teachers and support staff entered its second week. Teachers have also been on strike in West Virginia and Arizona. Other strikes and protests this year included metal and autoworkers in Germany, Turkey, and Eastern Europe, pensioners in Spain and railway workers and lecturers in Britain.

The violent and unprovoked assault on the peaceful protest camp in Notre-Dame-des-Landes by the Macron government is a warning. The ruling class will stop at nothing to repress the explosive opposition in the working class against its unpopular pro-business and

pro-war policies.

“I’m not sure that sending heavy forces against protesters is the best of tactics,” warned Philippe Martinez, the leader of the Stalinist CGT union. Martinez and the unions have been negotiating the attacks with Macron and are horrified by the danger of a social explosion and the development of an independent revolutionary movement of the working class.

On Monday evening, solidarity protests in support of occupants of Notre-Dame-des-Landes took place in the west of France, as well as in Paris, Lyon and Marseille. The largest erupted in Nantes where, according to police sources, some 1,200 people gathered. In Rennes around 200 demonstrators gathered on Sainte-Anne Square chanting: “They destroy, we rebuild.” At around 8:45 p.m. police forces reportedly fired tear gas at protesters.

In Paris hundreds of protesters gathered in the district of Belleville in the northeast of the capital. They blocked the Rue de Belleville with construction barriers and chanted, “Who is ZAD? She is ours,” and “ZAD everywhere, expulsion nowhere.” Marylène, a 49-year-old civil servant who participated in the spontaneous protest, told a reporter, “To send 2,500 gendarmes to evacuate families, sometimes with children, is worthy of an authoritarian regime.”



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