

French police assault at music festival leaves young man missing, feared drowned

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As young people took part in a music festival on June 21 on a wharf in Nantes, western France, police forces launched a violent assault on the concert. In the course of the police crackdown, 14 people fell seven meters into the Loire river. One young man, since identified as 24-year-old Steve Caniço, is missing and is feared to have drowned in the river during the attack.

On the night of Friday, June 21 to Saturday, June 22, at around 4:30 a.m., some 20 officers from the Anti-Crime Brigade (BAC) and riot police were dispatched to stop the festivities, which had been authorized to conclude half an hour earlier, at 4:00 a.m.

According to *Le Monde*, the music was turned off once the police arrived, “but as soon as the police left, the organizers turned it back on. The police returned to the festival and, according to Johann Mougnot, Chief of Staff of the Prefect of Loire-Atlantique, were hit by bottles and projectiles. The CRS police company assigned to Nantes for that evening, which specializes in this type of operation, was in the central city. It would not arrive to the scene until later.”

The police assault, captured on video by participants at the festival, involved tear gas, stun grenades, rubber bullets, and attack dogs, all of which have been used against “yellow vest” protests over the past six months.

Videos of the attack, shared widely on social media, confirm the violence of the operation and the confusion and panic created in the crowd. Aliyal, a student, described the scene of panic: “People were running all over the place to escape the tear gas. I saw people falling into the water, screaming for rescue boats to come and get them.”

Another young woman told 20 Minutes that “People were trapped with no way out. For the first time in my life, I was really scared in front of the police.”

Fourteen people fell into the waters of the Loire from a height of seven metres. According to the prefecture, seven

were rescued by the fire brigade, four by a rescue association mandated by the city of Nantes for the evening, and three others returned to shore on their own.

Caniço, a 24-year-old animator, last spotted Saturday morning at around 4 a.m. when he fell into the river, has not been heard from since the police assault.

Theo, a friend of Caniço’s who was present with him the night he disappeared, told *Le Figaro* that Steve, who could not swim, did not use drugs during the evening and that he had drunk “a little alcohol but he wasn’t drunk.”

Anger is rising on social media against the brutal police crackdown. Theo stated on Facebook and Twitter: “If this story ends in the worst way, the responsibility will be with the deadly cops who were here tonight; to have fun seeing us running in panic, and to that damn prefect—what a buffoon you are. We will not be silent, we will not let it happen, we will not let you do it.”

The supporters of the missing young man organized a demonstration in his honour. The Nantes-based musical organization, Média’son, has filed a legal complaint against unnamed defendants over the incident.

The police and the interior ministry have sought to minimize the police’s responsibility for Caniço’s disappearance. Thierry Palermo, the deputy director for public security, said: “At no time was there a police charge aimed at pushing young people towards the Loire.”

Earlier in the day, Interior Minister Christophe Castaner had been forced to admit that the disappearance was “perhaps” linked to the police operation.

Contrary to Castaner and Palermo’s statements, there was no justification for the police violence.

While the police have spoken of “degraded people” and “drug addicts” to justify their assault, no information that has emerged so far would suggest that there was any violence on the part of the festival-goers. The police, on the other hand, were aware that their intervention could

lead to death. The wharf was not secure and the youth, surrounded by charging police officers, could escape the tear gas and dogs only by jumping into the Loire.

The General Inspectorate of the National Police (IGPN), a department of the police, has been ordered to conduct an internal investigation. Questioned by *Ouest France*, the SGP-FO police union could only acknowledge “A serious error of judgement, a mistaken command, putting in danger, first, our colleagues, and also the citizens ... They were not rioters attacking Nantes requiring an immediate intervention. They were partyers.”

Measures to allow police to more rapidly use weapons, imposed under the state of emergency by François Hollande's Socialist Party government, supposedly in the name of fighting “terrorism,” have encouraged a surge in police violence.

Almost a year ago in a suburb of Nantes, the CRS shot and killed a 22-year-old man after he reversed away from a police check point, without endangering the lives of the CRS. The WSWS noted at the time, “three years after the imposition of the state of emergency, the structures and practices of a police state are emerging more and more.”

Faced with opposition to its austerity policies, expressed in the “yellow vest” protests, the Macron government is reliant upon brutal police repression and lethal violence. More than 20 people have been badly injured, including the loss of eyes and hands, from police attacks during “yellow vest” demonstrations, and one person, Zineb Redouane, died of a tear gas canister in his face. Macron deployed the army against the “yellow vests” while senior officials discussed the possibility of shooting upon the crowds.

The disproportionate police intervention in Nantes is the product of this blank cheque granted to the police by the capitalist state, which feels itself besieged and hated.



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