

One month since Steve Caniço's disappearance in police raid in Nantes, France

Macron threatens: "Calm must be restored in the country"

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22 July 2019

Today marks one month since the disappearance and presumed drowning of Steve Maia Caniço, the 24-year-old after-school-care aide from Nantes, France, during a violent police crackdown on a techno music festival at the city's Wilson Quai in the early hours of Saturday, June 22.

In the month since, thousands of family members, friends and supporters have protested to demand that those who carried out and ordered the police assault be held accountable. The slogan "Where is Steve?", posterized on statues and spray-painted throughout Nantes and widely shared online, has become a synonym for opposition to police brutality in France.

Caniço was last seen at the festival early on June 22, near its scheduled conclusion at 4:00 a.m. The music went on half an hour longer than authorized. The police then launched a military-style raid on the event with tear gas, attack dogs, rubber bullets and stun grenades, brutally beating and tasing the concert-goers. Fourteen people fell seven meters off the edge of the quay into the Loire river as they sought to escape the police rampage. Steve Caniço, who is believed to have fallen into the Loire, did not know how to swim. His body has still not been found.

Last week, *Libération* published a video of the raid obtained from cell phone footage captured by youth at the festival. It demolishes the absurd justification offered by police—that the raid was a defensive response to a few bottles being thrown at them as they sought to close down the event.

It shows that the police operation was coordinated and carried out fully in the knowledge of the danger posed to the attendees. The police are seen marching in single file bearing riot shields, with one officer

restraining an attack dog, and pushing the youth directly toward the river. They continue on, even as voices from the scattering young people can clearly be heard yelling "the Loire is behind!"

A few minutes later, more shouts that people have fallen in. "There are people who have jumped into the Loire because of the tear gas," one says. "Go and save them now!" The police continue to throw tear gas in the direction of the river.

As evidence continues to mount that Steve's likely death was the entirely foreseeable outcome of the actions of the authorities, the Macron administration is not only doubling down in defense of the police. It is taking the opportunity to send a message to the population that the state's forces can attack and kill the working class with impunity.

Asked by reporters yesterday to comment on Caniço's disappearance, Macron stated lamely that he was "very occupied by the situation." He then asserted that "one must not forget the context of the violence that our country has been living through," concluding, "Calm must be restored in the country."

Macron's hypocritical reference to "violence" is evidently an allusion to the mass "yellow vest" protests against social inequality over the past six months. The violence however has been almost entirely on the side of the state forces, which have injured 2,500, shot the eye out of over 20, and blown off the hands of five with stun grenades. A 73-year-old woman, Geneviève Legay, was placed in a coma due to a police charge; 80-year-old Zenouab Radouane died from a stun grenade in the face that shattered her jaw. While 7,000-9,000 protesters have been arrested, not a single police officer has been charged.

And this record is now being utilized to declare that protests must cease and “calm must be restored in the country,” or the police repression will only intensify.

Last month, Interior Minister Christophe Castaner granted medals of honor to more than 9,000 police involved in the repression of the “yellow vests.” Those honored include Grégoire Chassaing, the police commissioner in charge of the police raid in Nantes on June 21-22.

Castaner has ordered an internal police investigation into the events in Nantes, so that those responsible for the raid that led to Steve’s disappearance will be charged with conducting the investigation. Significantly, the concluding song at the festival that triggered the crackdown by police—among whom support for the neo-fascists is well known—was the 1980s French punk song, “Porcherie des Bérurier noir,” popularly associated with youth protest chants against the neo-fascist National Rally and its precursor, the *Front national*.

Yesterday, 700 gathered at the Quai Wilson to mark the one-month anniversary of Steve’s disappearance and denounce the actions of the authorities. They formed two human chains next to the Loire and held a minute’s silence.

“One has the impression that justice goes at two different speeds,” Alexane, a 24-year-old delivery driver and friend of Steve, told *Le Monde* at the protest. “If it was a CRS [riot officer] who fell in the water, all the means would have been mobilized to find him in record time. And the participants at the concert would immediately have been accused.”

Caniço was according to all reports a widely-beloved young man. The account given to *Libération* by his colleagues at the Treillières primary school, where he worked in the after-hours care program for several years, is particularly notable. “When we explained to the children that he had disappeared, some of them demanded that he come back. Others cried. Students haven’t gone back into the room where he worked because he is no longer there. He was always effervescent, and it has left a hole.”

An unbridgeable chasm separates the anger and opposition of workers and young people against this act of police violence from the cynical intervention of the opposition Socialist Party (PS) and Jean-luc Melenchon’s Unsubmissive France (*La France*

Insoumise —LFI).

On July 19, LFI launched what it called a “social media campaign” that is in fact a stunt committing no one to anything. It published videos on Twitter of deputies staring silently into a camera and holding a sign saying “where is Steve?” It has additionally called for a parliamentary commission of inquiry—a tried-and-tested method for drawing out the investigation and thus whitewashing the police, while demobilizing working-class opposition by promoting illusions that the parliamentary representatives of the ruling class will hold the police to account.

PS senator from Loire-Atlantique Michelle Meunier demanded that the state “change the doctrine for the maintenance of order” and claimed that the “mission of the police is to protect the population.”

These statements are aimed at covering up the essential issue: police violence is the inevitable outcome of the class function of the police as the armed bodies of the capitalist state, responsible for enforcing the financial elite’s domination of society by violently suppressing opposition in the working class. The fight against police violence is the fight by the working class to overthrow capitalism and establish workers’ governments across Europe and internationally, based on the socialist reorganization of society.

Both the PS and LFI are capitalist parties closely integrated into the police apparatus. It was former Socialist Party President Francois Hollande who, with votes from Mélenchon’s party, introduced the state of emergency in 2015, suspending democratic rights and vastly expanding police powers.



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