

French police assault Nantes protest against police drowning of Steve Caniço

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Protesters marched in cities across France against police violence and to commemorate Steve Maia Caniço, who drowned in the Loire River in Nantes amid a violent police crackdown on a music festival. Anger is erupting against the government's unabashed defense of the deadly, unprovoked violence of the police.

Demonstrations were organized across France in Orléans, Amiens, Marseille, Nice, Bourges, Poitiers and Paris, after initial demonstrations that took place in Lille and Dijon at the end of July. In Lyon, "yellow vests" threw eggs and tomatoes at the headquarters of Thomas Rudigoz, a legislator of the ruling Republic on the March (LRM) party. Stickers demanding "Justice for Steve" were also attached to the side of the building.

In Nantes itself, the regional police prefecture banned all public gatherings inside several perimeters in the center of the town, trampling on democratic rights, on the vague pretext that individuals "of Black Bloc type" might demonstrate. The police prefect also publicly announced that he had obtained from the government the necessary forces to repress protests in Nantes.

Approving the decision to ban demonstrations in Nantes, Interior Minister Christophe Castaner declared, "I completely understand the desire to organize a commemoration, but I cannot recognize a commemoration that takes place violently."

Three thousand people, according to Radio France-Bleu Loire, marched Saturday in Nantes, defying the police threats, to oppose police violence and commemorate Steve's life. The prefecture set up mass deployments of police to try to intimidate those who wanted to participate in the protest. Around 30 people were arrested during and after the protest, and 34 others were arrested and detained on a preventive basis before

the protest. Several demonstrators were wounded.

On protest signs and graffiti on building walls, protesters bitterly denounced the police, with slogans such as "The Police Inspectorate say the murder was by the book," "The police kill," and "Riot police, to ensure our security please leave the area."

When the marchers arrived in front of the police prefecture, riot police fired water cannon and waves of tear gas grenades. Violent clashes continued throughout the afternoon between protesters and large squads of heavily armed riot policemen.

Steve Maia Caniço drowned around 4:30 a.m. on the night of June 22, during the yearly National Music Festival, after police launched a violent raid on an electronic music party that had gone on a half hour longer than its permit allowed.

The authorities unleashed riot police, attack dogs, volleys of rubber bullets and stun grenades against peaceful young people who had come only to enjoy themselves. Police also fired tasers at individual partygoers and brutally beat the youth. Fourteen people fell seven meters into the Loire River as they tried to escape the onslaught of the police. Steve, who did not know how to swim, drowned in the Loire; his body was found a month later.

Marianne Rostan, the lawyer representing the victims of police violence, stated: "At this time, tear gas grenades began to rain down on the partygoers, preventing the rescue operations that could have unfolded in a calm situation. The only real option facing the commander of the police operation was to stop everything as fast as possible and send for every available rescue unit to help those who had fallen into the water. But police continued to fire tear gas grenades until 4:50 a.m."

Eighty-nine youth attacked by police on the day of

the National Music Festival filed a lawsuit charging police with life-threatening behaviour and failure to rescue an endangered person.

Steve's death has starkly unmasked the police state that exists in France, brutally assaulting all opposition to the Macron government. In the last 10 months, tens of thousands of police with armoured cars, water cannon, grenades, rubber bullets and assault rifles have wounded over 2,000 people, dozens of whom lost hands or eyes. There have been well over 7,000 arrests, including 1,900 on December 8 alone. It is the biggest wave of arrests in mainland France since the Nazi Occupation, which Macron hailed by calling the Vichy head of state, Philippe Pétain, a "great soldier."

On June 16, Castaner publicly decorated policemen suspected of killing or badly wounding "yellow vest" protesters and Steve Caniço, praising their "remarkable action in the recent period."

These included commissioner Rabah Souchi, who led the police operations on March 23 in Nice during which Geneviève Legay, a 73-year-old woman, was thrown to the ground, badly wounded on the head and plunged into a coma; Captain Bruno Félix, who led riot police in Marseille who shot a tear gas grenade that fractured the face of Zinab Redouane, an 80-year-old woman closing her apartment windows, leading to her death; and Grégoire Chassaing, the commissioner in Nantes who led the assault on the musical event in Nantes where Steve Maia Caniço died.

With the support of the entire European Union, Macron is sending every possible signal that police can repress or even kill innocent people with impunity. The government and the General Inspectorate of the National Police (IGPN) relentlessly cover for police violence. Prime Minister Edouard Philippe provocatively cited the IGPN report, which brazenly claims "no evidence allows us to establish a direct link between the intervention of the security forces and the death of Steve Maia Caniço," denying that there was any "police charge" or "offensive action."

All available evidence indicates that the IGPN and the government are lying. Videos and eyewitness reports directly contradict the IGPN report, which says nothing about the devastating evidence incriminating the police, who carried out a military-style operation against a riverside concert, fully aware of the danger this posed to partygoers.

Four rescue workers who finally arrived that night gave an account to *Le Monde* that contradicts the IGPN report and supports that of the youth. According to the rescue workers, the music festival was "very calm." One said, "I don't know what definition the IGPN used to say they were facing a sudden movement by the crowd. If they mean by that a large number of people rapidly fleeing clouds of tear gas, then yes, there was a sudden movement."

Another rescue worker said, "I am the last person to spit on policemen, they do not have any easy job. But as I see it, this operation was inappropriate. The intervention seems totally disproportionate. Such a deployment of grenades just for music, in a non-residential neighbourhood, seems absolutely incredible—all the more so because in previous years, music continued until after 5 a.m."

The police violence against "yellow vests" and the attack which led to Steve's death are the response of the ruling class internationally to rising opposition to social inequality and police-military violence, with the building of an authoritarian regime in France unapologetically defending police murders of innocent workers and youth. The struggle against this violence requires mobilizing the working class in France and internationally in political struggle against austerity, war and the police state.



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