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Belgium

Massive repression of the demonstration against class and racist justice

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On Sunday 24 January 2021 a rally was held on the Place de l'Albertine in Brussels to denounce racism and the class character of justice in Belgium. A similar action had been banned by the Mayor of Brussels on 5 December 2020. While this time the rally was not banned outright, it was not authorized either. The political authorities and the police were therefore at liberty to repress the event if they felt like it.

Under these conditions, and in consultation with them, the presence of the families of the victims of violence and police killings, as well as many others, was no longer possible. The risk was too great, so they would not speak as initially planned. In this respect, the authorities of the country, at all levels, have succeeded in their coup: once again closing the public space to the families. If proof of the fundamentally racist nature of the police institution and the entire political apparatus that supports it was still needed, this is it. An abject situation, where taking the life of a son or daughter is not enough. It is still necessary to deploy all the repressive measures that the State knows how to mobilize in order, in practice, to try to force them into silence and put them under house arrest.

As soon as the rally began, the tension was palpable. While an agreement had been made with the police officers of the city of Brussels who were supervising the demonstration to tolerate it for 45 minutes, the federal reinforcements told us to leave the place immediately, under the pretext that the rally was simply forbidden. We were astonished that the different police forces present were not on the same wavelength.

During the whole time the speakers were speaking, the police encircled the square. Their presence was massive and ostentatious. Its members were in uniform, ready to intervene. The first incidents were already taking place: several young people were being harshly controlled around the square, whose only "crime" was clearly to be the undesirable racialized people in the public space. In fact, the information was confirmed that the police are preventing people from joining the gathering.

The gathering lasted the 45 minutes allotted by the police, not one more. As the time elapses, the forces of law and order come closer, the circle narrows. We had to leave the square immediately. Most of the people present moved away, others lingered for a few moments, some of them to respond to questions from reporters. Suddenly, the turning point. Police officers, this time with shields and truncheons, arrived at full speed and closed the road. The number of policemen present exploded. They were already shouting, charging, pushing and stopping people in the adjacent streets. Their aggressiveness was simply amazing, almost paralysing.

Very soon, down the square and towards the Central Station, a face-to-face confrontation took place between the police and participants in the rally, mainly young people, some of whom had spoken bravely and brilliantly a few minutes earlier. They were surrounded, outnumbered by police officers using dogs and tear gas on a massive scale. In the ensuing chaos, the police once again put one of them in mortal danger: a law enforcement vehicle accelerated sharply towards the small crowd and hit a teenager, who fell violently to the ground before getting up and moving away.

A few minutes later, all these people were kettled on the outskirts of the Central Station. There were about fifty of them. Some of them were on the ground, immobilised, surrounded by dozens and dozens of policemen, under the constant threat of fire engines. They were gradually being evacuated in the police buses towards the barracks. Very young, mostly non-white, people.

In the end, in response to a gathering of just over 150 people, gigantic means were deployed, applied with

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implacable force and unprecedented violence: federal and police zone reinforcements from almost all over the country, motorbikes, horses, vehicles by the dozen, six fire engines, a helicopter. All those present could confirm this: the police were solely responsible for the disturbances that took place in the afternoon. In its statement, the police demonstrated this when its spokesperson acknowledged that “the demonstration took place in a calm atmosphere”. Indeed, until the police decided otherwise and made more than a hundred arrests in total.

Finally, on the way home, we learn that a Rise for Climate action was held at Place du Luxembourg, in a peaceful atmosphere under the eye of a negligible police presence. It is of course good to see that these people were able to hold their rally in such conditions. But what a contrast with what is happening a few hundred metres away.

In this country, certain uses of democratic freedoms are not tolerated, certain messages are not good to carry. Demanding truth and justice for victims of police killings is one of them. Demanding an end to racism, sexism and the class character of the police and justice also. To all those people and political organizations who condemn and support the repression of such gatherings, and say nothing about the systematic and permanent inhuman violence against oppressed social categories: Stop speaking out on democracy, freedom, equality or human dignity forever, because these are just empty words for you. You are unworthy of them.

The police humiliate, mutilate, rape, kill. When people unite to denounce it, the police humiliate again, mutilate, violate and threaten to kill. One day, however, there will be more of us on the street than they are. That day will be a beautiful day.

25 January 2020

Translated from [Gauche Anticapitaliste](#).

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