

Resisting the Eviction of the ZAD

Fighting for Our Dreams, Fighting for Another Reality

CrimethInc.

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Since the government’s decision to cancel the construction of an airport at Notre-Dame-des-Landes (NDDL) on January 17, 2018, life on la ZAD—the *Zone à Défendre* (Zone To Defend) where the airport was to be built—has been a complicated series of conflicts about whether to negotiate with the government for the future of the land. Any lingering illusions that it could be possible to coexist peacefully with the authority of the state were dispelled this week, as the French government initiated what they hope will be the decisive eviction of this world-famous inspiring autonomous zone. To learn about the fifty years of struggle that led up to this moment, read our full history, “La ZAD: Another End of the World Is Possible.”

The end of March marked the end of winter, and with it came the possibility that the police would strike. Over the past several months, the ghost of a massive eviction like Operation Caesar of 2012 haunted everyone’s minds. On Saturday, April 7, the media announced the convergence of about 2500 police forces in the region of Nantes and Rennes. Over the weekend, it became obvious that the authorities were about to launch their final eviction operation to conclude the “illegal occupation” of the land once and for all. On Monday, April 9, 2018, at around 3 am, police forces entered the ZAD via the road D281 to recapture this autonomous territory.

Day 1: The Eviction Begins

At 3:22 am on Monday morning, an emergency call appeared online alerting activists that police forces had entered the ZAD via the D281, the famous “*route des chicanes*.” Entering the occupied zone, they encountered numerous barricades that had appeared overnight. This slowed their progress. The arrival of *gendarmerie* troops (military-status police forces) during the night confirmed that authorities wanted to get a head start on the operation by deploying their forces beforehand—as, for legal reasons, the eviction couldn’t start before 6 am.

The authorities were counting on the element of surprise to facilitate their operation, but that didn’t work; in the obscurity of the night, the first barricades were set on fire. Before the operation had even begun, the police were already the target of numerous attacks. The first tear gas exploded into the fresh country air.

Meanwhile, numerous reports mentioned the massive police presence around and inside the ZAD. Dozens of trucks and military transport vehicles belonging to the *gendarmerie* were seen at various locations; two armored vehicles were already inside the perimeter. Anti-riot fences began to appear on the major roads. It was reported that at least one comrade was arrested and another injured during these clashes.

Around 6 am, the Minister of the Interior, Gérard Collomb, posted the following statement:

“This morning, starting at 6 am, the *Gendarmerie* will start an eviction operation of the illegal occupants of the parcels of land of Notre-Dame-des-Landes. In accordance with the Prime Minister’s announcements on January 17, the objective is to put an end to this lawless area.”

The eviction was officially underway. According to reports, the Ministry of Interior sent 2500 *gendarmes*—25 squadrons—to evict the occupied zone and its 250–300 inhabitants. In addition, a helicopter, several drones for aerial surveillance, and four armored vehicles (VBRG) arrived at the ZAD to break through the barricades created by zadists.

Later that morning, in an interview on national radio, Gérard Collomb stated that about 40 different sites—representing approximately 100 individuals—were to be evicted and destroyed in the operation. He explained that police forces would stay on site “as long as will be necessary to avoid any new occupation,” then added: “we will destroy these places, but we will propose a rehousing to everyone.” Due to the number of places to be raided and the intensity of the clashes that could occur, this eviction operation could last more than just a couple days. Once more, with this massive eviction, the state is seeking to take revenge on the anti-airport movement. The goal is to regain control over its territory and wipe out once and for all any autonomous experiments and forms of life.

In response to the attack, zadists made the following call:

Kept at bay for years by the movement, a new attempt at eviction of the residents of the ZAD at Notre-Dame-des-Landes has begun. Starting at 3 am today, the operation began deploying in all its brutality: interminable lines of blue police vans, armored vehicles, tear gas, the first injuries and the first arrests. *Gendarmes* announced that reporters were strictly forbidden “throughout the operation” and blocked their access to the site. They declared that the press was prohibited from taking photos and that the media would have access only to images supplied by the *Gendarmerie*. The expulsions confirm the government’s pretense of re-establishing the rule of law while in fact grossly flouting the law. The Prefecture has not even granted the inhabitants of the ZAD access to the minimum guaranteed by the law on the right to housing, in this case the right to individual procedures and the right to contest an eviction decision. Yet the residents of most areas within the ZAD have identified themselves by name on several occasions over the past few years. The Prefecture’s outrageous duplicity is visible today in all its hypocrisy: after announcing it would seek a “serene and peaceful evolution of the situation,” it sends 2500 police/army to destroy residents’ homes. We are told that a selection will be made on the basis of categories that are pure fiction and have no bearing on anything but the needs of the repressive storytelling the government has locked itself into. There is no false division here between radicals on the one hand and farmers on the other; what exists are a number of different and intertwined ways of sharing this land. Contrary to what [Minister of the Interior] Gérard Collomb claims, in fact, no one has been individually legalized over the recent weeks at the expense of the others. The movement as a whole has proposed a framework for a collective agreement involving all residents and all their projects. But the government could not simply admit that the proposed airport was useless; they were bent on taking revenge against those who had forced the abandonment of the project. The land is dying, the most brutal forms of economic processes are atrophying our lives, and everywhere, people aspire to alternatives to that situation. On February 10, 30,000 people committed to supporting the future of the ZAD. But the government’s political message is very clear this morning: It will allow no possibility for spaces where alternative experiments can take place.

Our anger is profound this morning at the terrible waste that the destruction of the houses and living spaces we have built here represents. Our emotion at the idea that the collective experiment that is the ZAD can be endangered by a police/army

assault is strong. But the ZAD will not disappear because of this. We live here, we have roots here in this countryside, and we shall not leave it. We salute the courage of the people who have already joined us on the site and have answered our calls. In 2012, the government's destructive arrogance ultimately turned against it. In the current context of widening strikes, demonstrations, and occupations throughout the country, we believe that the razing of Notre-Dame-des-Landes will become a new engine of a revolt that will take hold. This destructive operation will turn against its perpetrators. We call on all those who can join us now or in the next few days to come to the ZAD. More than 80 assemblies are already planned all over France this evening, including in Nantes and Rennes at 6 pm. The response to these expulsions will also extend over time. A demonstration has been called in Nantes on Saturday and a convergence on the ZAD is being organized for this weekend.

Facing the continuous waves of destruction, evictions, and repression orchestrated by the state, zadists defended every inch of land and every single building by all means necessary. The entire day was filled with acts of resistance and blockades, as well as fierce and courageous attacks against police forces. Unfortunately, at the end of this first day, several important buildings inside the ZAD had already been destroyed. Among them, *Les Planchouettes*, the collective and individual cabins of the *100 noms*, and the agricultural shed and sheepfold of the *100 noms*.

While the state and the prefecture officially committed to preserving and protecting the agricultural projects of the ZAD, the destruction of the sheepfold of the *100 noms* revealed the absolute hypocrisy of the prefecture and the emptiness of its official promise to maintain the agricultural projects. According to Nicole Klein, the prefect of *Pays de la Loire et Loire-Atlantique*, the destruction of the farm was justified, as "the *100 noms* have not filed for an agricultural project and are composed of precarious dwellings." Welcome to a world in which everything must be put under state control in order to be permitted to exist!

In total, 13 locations were raided and evicted and six were completely destroyed during the first day of the operation.

In reaction to the evictions at NDDL, more than 80 spontaneous gatherings and actions of solidarity took place throughout France and Europe that same day and night. To show their solidarity with those facing repression at the ZAD, activists occupied city halls, gathered in front of government buildings, took the streets in spontaneous demonstrations, blocked traffic, and covered numerous walls with messages of solidarity.

Day 2: Unleashing the Storm

The second day of the operation began like the previous one, with burning barricades to slow the evictions. However, it was clear that the operation was becoming more massive than the government had originally announced. Shortly after 6 am, zadists were already mentioning on *zad.nadir* that police trucks were too numerous to be counted. Reinforcements had arrived on site overnight. The authorities themselves announced via the national media that the situation at the ZAD was worsening. That day, the majority of the confrontations took place around the areas of "*les Fosses noires*" (the Black Pits), one of the emblems of the struggle against the airport, *la Chèvrerie*, and *les Vraies Rouges*.

By 7:30 am, police forces were already throwing numerous stun grenades and tear gas canisters to push the zadists back. The zadists retaliated with whatever projectiles they had at hand. This confrontation set the tone for the entire day. All day long, the armored vehicles of the *gendarmerie* were struck with incendiary devices; police forces seeking to gain ground were held at bay with showers of stones, Molotov cocktails, and other projectiles. The *gendarmerie* helicopter hovering over the conflict zone became a target for anti-hail rockets. To defend themselves during the confrontations, zadists also used an artisanal catapult and trebuchet. Tractors belonging to local farmers assisted zadists in building barricades and protecting important sites in the occupied zone.

The confrontations escalated in intensity during the second day of the operation. Unfortunately, so did the number of injuries. At the end of the day, the medic teams at the ZAD reported that about 30 individuals had been treated at the medic station. Two seriously injured comrades were evacuated and hospitalized, and four others were also sent to the hospital for more minor injuries. According to the ZAD medics:

“The majority of injuries have been caused by sting grenades’ shrapnel received especially in the face or in the thorax, LBD (ed. Flash-Ball) shots in the thorax, and flat trajectory shots of tear gas canisters [...] Moreover, since the end of this afternoon, numerous firings of GLI-F4 grenades have been noticed. The medic team expresses its strong worry for the following days.”

The GLI-F4 grenade is an instant tear gas grenade which creates a strong blast to deliver the gas. As always, police forces cried in the national media that they were the ones being injured. In total, 28 *gendarmes* were injured, most of them for “sound trauma” due to explosions; one allegedly has a fractured nose, and four others were injured when their own grenade exploded. Mainstream media always attempts to portray the injuries inflicted on zadists and the injuries experienced by police officers on the same level, as if both sides had access to the same equipment during confrontations. In fact, it appears that most of the injured police suffered offensive injuries caused by their own attacks.

At the end of the day, the impasse at the ZAD was total. Some zadists demanded that police forces withdraw either outside the ZAD or to the other side of the road D281. By doing so, they hoped to reopen dialogue with the authorities in order to halt the destruction of the remaining habitations and agricultural projects. It is no surprise that the authorities didn’t pay attention to this request for a truce. However, what is interesting is that during an official press conference, the authorities had the nerve to say that they were still engaged in a dialogue with the ZAD. Welcome to a reality in which our rulers can say one thing and do the exact opposite without even shocking anyone anymore!

On Tuesday, April 10, three new locations were destroyed during the eviction process: *La Chèvrerie*, *Le Port*, and *La Tour*. In total, after two days of operations, 16 squats or habitations have been raided and evicted and 15 of them have been razed to the ground. During a daily press conference, Nicole Klein said that the initial objective announced by Prime Minister Edouard Philippe of evicting 40 locations would be reduced to 30—unless the government redefines its objectives yet again.

Earlier that day, with tear gas and concussion grenades exploding in the background, we interviewed a comrade on the ground to learn what was currently happening inside the ZAD.

Day 3: Our Dreams Are Stronger than Their Weapons

On Wednesday morning, the *gendarmarie* helicopter was already flying over the ZAD as police forces progressively surrounded the zone and closed its roads. But, as some zadists said: “they are numerous, we are determined.”

Around 7 am, clashes started again as a group of about 70 zadists attacked police forces not far from the road D281 and set fire to several barricades and trailers before retreating. Then, confrontations broke out in a nearby field where about 150 zadists equipped with handmade shields faced off with police forces for much of the day.

Shortly before mid-day, the ZAD published the following call:

A CALL FOR INTERGALACTIC SOLIDARITY ACTIONS EVERYWHERE TO END THE DESTRUCTION OF THE ZAD OF NOTRE DAME DES LANDES

We are writing with the smell of tear gas rising from our fingers. The springtime symphony of birdsong is punctuated by the explosive echo of concussion grenades. Our eyes are watering, less from the gas than the sadness, because our friends' homes, barns, and organic farms are being destroyed. Bulldozers, supported by 2500 riot police, armored vehicles, helicopters, and drones, are rampaging through these forests, pastures, and wetlands to crush the future we are building here on the ZAD (the Zone to Defend).

We are calling on you to take solidarity actions everywhere; it could be holding demos at your local French embassy or consulate, or taking actions against any suitable symbol (corporate or otherwise) of France! And if you are not too far away, bring your disobedient bodies to join us on the zone. If the French government evicts the ZAD, it will be like evicting hope.

For fifty years, this unique checkerboard landscape was the site of a relentless struggle against yet another climate-wrecking infrastructure, a new airport for the nearby city of Nantes. Farmers and villagers, activists and naturalists, squatters and trade unionists wove an unbreakable ecology of struggle together and three months ago, on the 17th of January, the French government announced that the airport project would be abandoned. But this incredible victory, won through a diversity of creative tactics from petitions to direct action, legal challenges to sabotage, had a dark shadow. In the same breath that declared the abandonment came the announcement that the people occupying these 4000 acres of liberated territory, the 300 of us living and farming in 80 different collectives, would be evicted because we dared not just to be against the airport, but its WORLD as well.

Since that victorious day, the battle has transformed itself and is now no longer about a destructive infrastructure project, but about sharing the territory we inhabit. We stopped this place from being covered in concrete and so it is up to us to take care of its future. The movement therefore maintains that we should have the right to manage the land as a commons (see its declaration, “The Six Points for the ZAD because there will never be an Airport”). Today, this is the struggle of the ZAD (Zone to Defend) of Notre Dame Des Landes.

The ZAD was launched in 2009 after a letter (distributed during the first French climate camp here) written by locals inviting people to occupy the zone and squat the abandoned farmhouses. Now the zone has become one of Europe's largest laboratories of communing. With its bakeries, pirate radio station, tractor repair workshop, brewery, anarchitectural cabins, banqueting hall, medicinal herb gardens, a rap studio, dairy, vegetable plots, weekly newspaper, flourmill, library and even a surrealist lighthouse, it has become a concrete experiment in regaining control of everyday life.

In 2012, the French state's attempt to evict the zone to build the airport was fiercely resisted; despite numerous demolitions, 40,000 people turned up to rebuild and the government withdrew. The police have not set foot on the ZAD since... that is, until Monday morning, when at 3 am the *gendarmes* pierced into the zone.

On day one, they destroyed some of the most beautiful cabins and barns, but yesterday we stopped the cops from getting to the *Vraies Rouges*, which happens to be where one of our negotiators with the government lives. Destroying the house of those that agreed to sit at the table with you was a strategic mistake. The fabulous ZAD press team used this as the media hook and today we are winning the battle of the story. If enough people get to the zone over the next days, we could win the battle on the territory as well. We need rebel everything, from cooks to medics, fighters to witnesses. We doubt this rural revolt will be finished before the weekend, when we are also calling people to come and rebuild en mass.

Already, solidarity demonstrations have taken place in over 100 cities across France, while the town halls of several towns were occupied. Zapatistas demonstrated in Chiapas, Mexico; there were actions in Brussels, Spain, Lebanon, London, Poland, Palestine, and New York, and the underground car park of the French embassy in Munich was sabotaged. They will never be able to evict our solidarity.

Questioned at the *Assemblée Nationale* (National Assembly) on the situation at the ZAD, Prime Minister Edouard Philippe paid tribute to the supposed "great professionalism" of the law enforcement officers [read: despicable mercenaries] who are conducting the evictions. Contrary to what some politicians from his own political party were requesting, he emphasized that there would be no interruption in the operation and no effort to reduce the intensity of the confrontations in order to reestablish some kind of dialogue. Edouard Philippe added:

"The operations are taking place in accordance with the calendar that was decided... The operations will continue in the same spirit, with the same firmness, and at the same pace."

It seemed that the government expected the operations to last until the end of the week. Meanwhile, at 7:30 pm, zadists posted on zad.nadir a list of some of the many individuals injured during the day.

"Today, at 5:45 pm, we saw 9 injuries due to the use of Flash Balls (rubber bullets), including one serious injury in the face, and 16 injuries due to flat-trajectory shots of tear gas canisters aimed at the head. According to the medics, it is obvious that

police forces are using tear gas canisters as projectiles to target people. There are also 22 injuries due to grenades' explosions, of which a dozen relate to grenades shrapnel, including some in the throat, some with suspected sequelae to tendons and nerves, and others related to auditory troubles due to the explosions of F4 grenades that were shot at people randomly and without aiming. In addition, 12 head injuries were reported, with some involving eye issues.”

Moreover, a badly injured person in need of evacuation was blocked for more than 30 minutes by police forces before finally being permitted to access proper medical aid.

Even after the prefect officially announced the end of the evictions for the day during her press conference, police forces inside the ZAD continued their operations, using tear gas and all kinds of grenades to try to regain control of the roads and consequently injuring additional zadists. During this long day of confrontations, we know that at least the cabins of *la Gaité*, *la Boite Noire*, *la Dalle à Caca* and *L'isolette* were evicted. As of this publishing, we don't know yet whether they have been destroyed.

At 9:16 pm, some zadists posted an update concerning the violent eviction of *la Chèvrerie*. While trying to resist the eviction by holding onto the sheet metal of the roof, a comrade had two of his tendons severed on the same finger. He received 30 stiches inside one of his palms and 15 stiches on the other side of the same hand. The other hand was also damaged during the arrest—and all this while he was handcuffed and evicted by force.

Day 4: Breaking News

President Emmanuel Macron announced the end of the evictions on the grounds that “the operation has arrived at the point where everything that had to be evicted has been evicted. Now there will be in the following days a mission, under the authority of the prefect, that consists in allowing legal agricultural projects to be realized.”

In total, 29 squats had been evicted, fulfilling their objective of evicting about 30 squats. Now the authorities can undertake the second stage of the operation, clearing out the wreckage. On Friday, April 13, the prefect Nicole Klein is to hold a press conference officially announcing the resumption of negotiations with [some elements of] the ZAD. She said: “I will resume the negotiations with l'Acipa and those who want to. Therefore, I am announcing the end of the operations led by police forces.”

While the ZAD was fairly quiet on Thursday morning—with medics counting more than 80 people injured during the confrontations on Wednesday—around 1:30 pm, a squadron of *gendarmes* fell into a trap. A group of zadists allegedly attacked a truck, injuring 10 gendarmes; five had their legs burnt and another received multiple pieces of shrapnel from an artisanal explosive device. Several more confrontations took place towards the end of the day. The medic team recorded at least seven people injured by the end of the day.

As the Operations Continue...

Our comrades at the ZAD have more difficult days ahead. The “resumption of negotiations” is a trap to make the remaining zadists complicit in the brutal violence that has been enacted against

their neighbors. We hope that everyone who has not yet been attacked will stand with those who were targeted by the government. If we do not all stand together, the authorities will come for all of us, one by one.

Let's pay tribute to the courage and determination of the individuals currently at the ZAD who are still fighting fiercely for the reality they have created there and for what they believe in. The fact that zadists still possess the tenacity to confront military forces and defend their habitations at all costs, knowing that they were in the minority in a last-ditch battle for the survival of the ZAD, will surely inspire many others worldwide. Whatever the result of this struggle, we will remember the precious lessons that the ZAD at Notre-Dame-des-Landes taught us, and continue carrying in our hearts our desire to build new realities outside the framework of their destructive world.

Never stop dreaming! Never stop fighting!

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