

Police use water cannons on Dakota Access Pipeline protesters

By Kevin Martinez
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Hundreds of protesters faced off against police in riot gear near Cannonball, North Dakota to demonstrate against the proposed Dakota Access oil pipeline. Police used water cannon on protesters as temperatures dropped to below freezing on Sunday night.

Hours earlier protesters had tried to remove burned out cars blocking the Backwater Bridge on Highway 1806, the main access point to the camp where the anti-pipeline protesters have gathered, near the Standing Rock Indian Reservation. The bridge had been closed since October 27 when authorities declared that it was structurally unfit for traffic. Protesters have accused the government of blocking the bridge to prevent access to construction sites further north.

Protesters live-streamed the events on Facebook, which showed people up against a phalanx of riot police.

The latest incident began around 6p.m. when protesters began to approach the line of cops. According to the police, one officer was injured after being struck in the head with a rock. Police then used water cannon, tear gas and concussion grenades on protesters as temperatures dropped into the 20s Fahrenheit.

Protesters began setting small fires to warm themselves and prevent hypothermia for those who had been sprayed with water cannon. Rob Keller, spokesman for the Morton County Sherriff's Department, confirmed that water cannon had been used to prevent the fires from spreading and for crowd control.

Activists said that many were injured, including one person who was in cardiac arrest after being hit by a rubber bullet. A local gym was opened to provide relief, and emergency responders from the nearby Standing Rock and Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe have

provided help.

Frustration with the blockaded bridge had been boiling over for weeks. Activists say that the barricade has prevented emergency services heading south into the camp. One reason protesters wanted to remove the burned-out vehicles was to show cameras the large police force assembled behind them.

Dallas Goldtooth, an activist with the Indigenous Environmental Network, told *The Bismarck Tribune*, "Folks have a right to be on a public road. It's absurd that people who've been trying to take down the barricade now have their lives at risk." Police have also reinforced the blockade with wire and cement jersey barriers.

While government officials have justified the closing of the bridge by claiming it is structurally unsound, the Department of Transportation has refused to inspect the bridge, citing ongoing protests. The indigenous activists have thus been put in a catch-22 situation where they are told to be patient and wait for a fictitious government response and when they inevitably decide to take matters into their own hands are met with brutal repression.

Tar Houska, an activist from Honor the Earth, told media that over 200 people had been pepper sprayed, tear gassed and doused with water cannon, saying, "They're using everything and anything." She added, "This has been weeks and weeks of those vehicles on the road for no apparent reason, and it's a huge public safety risk. It's putting enormous pressure on the Standing Rock Sioux community and people who live and work in the area."

Indigenous rights activists from all over the world have demonstrated against the Dakota Access Pipeline for months. Native Americans are a very oppressed part of the working class, and in regards to the DAPL,

protests have drawn support from workers of all races and nationalities.

Demonstrators say the DAPL disturbs valuable cultural sites and is environmentally dangerous.

The nearly 1,200 mile-long pipeline has cost \$3.8 billion and is near completion. Protesters are saying it is not a matter of “if” but “when” the oil pipeline breaks and pollutes the Missouri River, which supplies water to not only the Standing Rock Sioux Indian Reservation, but 17 million other people as well. The pipeline built by Energy Transfer company can pump 570,000 barrels of crude oil a day, and according to the company, is safer than transporting it by truck or train.

The lame duck Obama administration has stalled on giving the green light to the completion of the pipeline. The Army Corps of Engineers says it plans to “revise its regulations” to make sure its dealing with tribes are “confirmed by the US Constitution, treaties, statutes, executive orders, judicial decisions and presidential documents and policies.”

The White House has essentially kicked forward the problem into the next year, when the incoming Trump administration is expected to approve new drilling for oil and gas conglomerates. Kelcy Warren, CEO of Energy Transfer, told PBS “News Hour” of his opposition to the protesters, claiming, “This is not a peaceful protest. If they want to stick around and continue to do what they’re doing, great, but we’re building the pipeline.”

The company still lacks permission from the US Army Corps of Engineers to begin drilling the final phase of the project under the Missouri River. The oil companies say that the delays in construction have cost their businesses nearly \$100 million.

President-elect Donald Trump has a personal stake in the pipeline. His financial disclosure forms reveal he has between \$500,000 and \$1 million invested in Energy Transfer Partners, and \$500,000 to \$1 million in Phillips 66, which will have 25 percent ownership of the pipeline project when it is completed. Energy Transfers’ stock price shot up 15 percent since Trump’s election, from \$33.37 to \$38.68 a share.

Two days after the election, Kelcy Warren indicated on an earnings call they expect more favorable treatment from a future Trump administration saying, “It’s only going to get better. For us to preach that we support infrastructure development and yet do

everything we can to block it, that doesn’t feel very good to me. But I think that’s going to change.”

Given the costly nature of the delays so far, the companies may have to reroute the pipeline around Lake Oahe or find some other compromise before the new administration is sworn in on January 20.

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