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Facebook Festivals in France

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The big thing now in France are parties initiated on Facebook, with thousands of young people turning up for a free self-organised festival in different cities.

One young guy, very drunk, died falling off a bridge in Nantes on Wednesday 12th just a few days ago. So the whole of the rulers' media, accompanied by "concerned" pop psychologists and politicians (mayors and ministers), exploded with a call for a ban on these events - heavy fines for the organisers, saturation policing. Reducing the whole question to the problem of le binge drinking (they use the English term) is a pathetic pretext for clamping down on young people gathering en masse without being organised according to market principles or by external authority. This is a bit like the clamp-down on rave parties in the UK in the 90s - though many of these raves were paying events, unlike what happened in several cities in France on Wednesday night. And the music was, at least in the cities I've heard about, not at all like those of the rave parties - centralised from a stage or so overwhelming in volume you can't hear yourself think, let alone hold a conversation - but simply whatever each little group brought along themselves - portable stereos or guitars, etc. With the enormous amount of people drinking and partying, one death from falling from a bridge is nothing - the same happens all the time on New Years Eve without the call to ban New Year's Eve parties. What they don't want is this thing happening during the spring or summer, seasons that might prove to be very tense in terms of social contestation, like in Greece or Thailand (obviously these are very different situations and I certainly don't want to mix them up, but they are signs of a profound crisis for capitalist social relations, though Greece is far more likely to have a radicalising influence on France and elsewhere than Thailand of course).

Social contestation will increasingly become possible and the more the European crisis continues with its domino effect the more the State will want any gatherings of young people repressed before such gatherings become a good pretext for attacking this stupid society.

In Montpellier, the whole area was immediately surrounded by the police observing the intoxicating mix of marijuana and alcohol, and the mayor, drunk on the most destructive drug in the world - hierarchical power, proudly claimed that she watched it all in great detail through CCTV.

The party - 12,000 mainly young people - was apparently very good natured, with strangers inviting strangers to drink, smoke, chat and dance, etc. This during sometimes torrential rainfall. Obviously some young people got very drunk - surprise surprise - this was the evening before a long 4 day week-end (Thursday was a national holiday and most schools and even a lot of workplaces just shut down for the 4 days). With the summer exams looming, the chance to unwind from the stress of miseducation, the glories of "Family Life" and "end of the world" apocalyptic anxieties was seized by thousands. Though, of course, binge drinking is symptomatic of all these miseries, a fact partly acknowledged by the corny clichés of TV psychologists pretending to tell us something new, banning gatherings such as this will clearly only exacerbate these pains, against which binge drinking is a false anaesthetic. Those who have the most stake in the continuation of this sick society can only offer repression and hierarchically organised amelioration as a "cure" for such sick symptoms.

As night wore on, the riot police (CRS) bit by bit moved in and eventually forced the remains of the originally massive crowd onto the trams, where the party continued, with people singing, chanting football chants and just getting on well, sharing drinks, jokes and spliffs without the often tense anxiety of being hassled by sexual harassment, those wanting a fight or those wanting to steal something from you, which obviously sometimes happens on the late night tram when it finishes its journey in the more impoverished parts of town.

After 2 or 3 days of top story media propaganda - usually shown even before the intensifying stand-off in Thailand - various "apéros", as these spontaneous festivals are called, in various cities were either banned or heavily policed yesterday and the day before - on Friday and Saturday night. "Apéros" is slang for "apéritifs", though these were

hardly the same as a Martini before supper.

In Aubenas, Friday night, the cops completely closed down an ""apéro géant" - a "giant apéritif" - and there were more cops than potential festival-goers. The same, more or less, happened in Chambéry the same night.

In Le Mans, Saturday night, 200 cops surveilled 400 youths, alcohol being forbidden - even Martinis.

In Annecy an "apéro géant" was meant to have taken place on the shores of the lake, but the "préfecture" (administrative bureaucracy) of the region banned it on the pretext that the shores were "particularly dangerous", and, besides, the initiators (one could hardly call them "organisers", since all they did was announce it on Facebook) hadn't applied for permission.

In Troyes the "apéro géant", announced on Facebook with the sub-title "Free Entry - everyone bring what they want" was banned by the préfecture, with the Town Hall declaring that the consumption and sale of alcohol would be forbidden between 6pm last night and 9am this morning.

In Paris the police préfecture warned, through Facebook, the initiators of an "apéro géant" on May 23rd, of the grave risks of such a "non-organised or surveyed" gathering of possibly 50,000 people at the foot of the Eiffel Tower.

In Bergerac, the organisers of an "apéro géant" intended for July decided to submit to the current climate and apply for authorisation from the Town Hall and the préfecture.

More could be said about this, but for the moment - "That's All For Now, Folks!"