

US: Racist campaign against Somali immigrants in Maine

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Hundreds of people from throughout the state of Maine are expected to protest a January 11 rally that has been scheduled in Lewiston, the state's second largest city, by a white supremacist group calling itself the World Church of the Creator.

The racist group, which is based in East Peoria, Illinois and claims to be the fastest-growing white supremacist organization in the US, is calling for the expulsion of all Somalis from the Lewiston area. More than 1,000 Somali refugees have settled in the city over the last two years.

Fleeing civil war and economic and political chaos in their home country, the Somalis have come to Maine by way of Kenya, where they were placed in refugee camps. They began immigrating to the US in the mid-1990s, many settling in the Atlanta, Georgia area. Unhappy with conditions there, they sought a smaller community. The first Somalis arrived in Lewiston in February 2001. There are now over 400 Somali adults in the city, and the Somali population, including children, may be as high as 1,500, a little more than 4 percent of city's 36,000 inhabitants.

Lewiston is an old industrial city facing persistent unemployment and declining population. When the Somalis first began to arrive, they were welcomed. Soon, however, there was talk of property tax increases and baseless rumors of refugees receiving free cars and apartments.

The racists of the World Church of the Creator see an opportunity for recruitment and publicity. They are scapegoating the Somalis to capitalize on the fears of local residents who face high levels of unemployment and cutbacks in social services. Like Hitler, whom they openly hail as a hero, their aim is to whip up racial and religious hatred in order to destroy democratic rights

won over generations of struggle.

The white supremacists do not act in a vacuum, however. They found ammunition for their campaign in the recent actions of the city's mayor, Larry Raymond. Raymond issued a three-page public letter in early October, calling for a moratorium on new Somali arrivals and claiming that the city could not absorb more refugees "without negative results for all."



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