

Dozens of migrant farmworkers shot in Greece

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Thirty or more migrant workers have been wounded in a shooting on a strawberry farm in Southern Greece. Eight of the workers remain in critical condition.

Two hundred mainly Bangladeshi workers gathered at the farm late Wednesday to demand the payment of wages they were owed. According to news reports, the response of at least one farm foreman was to open fire on them. Initial indications, however, are that other farm management were involved.

The owner of the farm in the Nea Manolada area, who was reportedly not present during the incident, and one foreman have been arrested. Warrants for another two individuals have also been issued.

Nea Manolada, some 260 kilometres [160 miles] west of Athens, is an area where thousands of migrant workers are employed in agriculture.

A cover-up of the crime is already under way. Before any serious investigation had been mounted, police captain Haralambos Sfetsos told Associated Press that the workers had “moved threateningly” towards foremen before the shots were fired.

The fate of migrant workers is one of the most brutal expressions of the generalised and ongoing offensive against workers in Greece. Unemployment now stands at more than 25 percent in the country, and almost 50 percent among the youth, with growing numbers at subsistence levels, malnourished, homeless and with no access to health care.

The conditions facing workers in Nea Manolada typify what has been produced by the austerity measures demanded by the European Union (EU) and the International Monetary Fund on behalf of the global banks. Greece has been transformed into a living hell and migrants are forced to occupy its Seventh Circle.

In 2008, migrants staged a strike against inhumane working conditions, squalid housing and wages as low

as €5 (US\$6.53) a day. A newly launched social media campaign urging a boycott of fruit from Nea Manolada calls the region’s produce “blood strawberries”—an allusion to Africa’s “blood diamonds.” Echoes of the massacre of 47 striking platinum miners at Lonmin’s Marikana facility in South Africa by security forces on August 16, 2012 are also all too obvious in this episode.

Several previous attacks in the area include an incident last year when two Greek men were arrested for beating a 30-year-old Egyptian, jamming his head through a car window and dragging him for approximately a kilometre.

The growth of the anti-immigrant fascist movement, Golden Dawn, which has secured 18 seats in parliament, is generally attributed to misdirected anger and frustration over austerity. The fascists regularly carry out attacks on immigrants in Athens and other major cities.

Golden Dawn, however, only openly taps into the racism and xenophobia encouraged by all the major parties, who are scapegoating immigrants for the social catastrophe for which the ruling elite is wholly responsible.

In August 2012, police in Athens mounted Operation Xenios Zeus, involving mass arrests of migrants. By early February around 60,000 people had been stopped during police raids, with 4,200 detained due to lack of papers and awaiting deportation. Those imprisoned are housed in 30 special camps set up with EU financial support.

A report by Amnesty International speaks of a “humanitarian crisis” created by Greece’s mistreatment of asylum-seekers and migrants. Thousands of refugees, including many children, are being detained in “shameful [and] appalling”

conditions as they seek entry into the EU, the human rights group asserts. Unaccompanied children are held in “very poor conditions” at the Corinth detention centre, in what Amnesty calls a breach of international standards.

On February 5, the Council of State, Greece’s highest administrative court, ruled unconstitutional an earlier law granting second generation migrants the right to apply for Greek citizenship. Moves have also been made, unsuccessful so far, by the conservative ruling party New Democracy demanding that naturalized Greeks be banned from entering military academies or joining the armed forces and police services.



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