Sweden announces plans to deport up to 80,000 refugees

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The Swedish government has announced its intention to deport 80,000 refugees whose asylum applications have been rejected in the coming months. The Social Democratic-Green coalition in Stockholm, which enforced stricter asylum laws and border controls last year, is pursuing a vicious policy of deterrence against refugees and transforming the country, which boasted of its liberal refugee policy for decades, into a police state.

The same day as these measures were announced, Human Rights Watch published a report sharply criticising the drift toward authoritarianism throughout Europe, which European governments have justified as a response to the migrant crisis.

Human Rights Watch executive director Kenneth Roth wrote that the arrival of refugees from the Middle East is "driving many Western governments to roll back human rights protections," adding, "these backward steps threaten the rights of all" sections of the population, not just refugees.

This tendency is exemplified by the policies of the German government, which, despite Chancellor Angela Merkel's proclamations last year of a "welcoming culture," is in the midst of intensive preparations to further seal its country's borders and establish "processing centres"—i.e. internment camps—for refuges.

The publication of the 659-page Human Rights Watch report followed just one day after at least 24 refugees, including ten children, drowned in the Mediterranean Sea, adding to the 3,811 people who died last year attempting to seek refuge in Europe from war and violence in their native countries stoked up by decades of Western military intervention.

Social Democratic Swedish interior minister Anders Ygeman told television broadcaster SVT that the government had already ordered the police and immigration authorities to implement mass deportations. Swedish daily *Dagens Industri* quoted the minister as saying, "I expect 60,000 people will be affected, but it could be 80,000."

Ygeman noted that the government would first aim at a "voluntary" return of refugees, but then added, "If this does not work, it will be necessary to carry out their return by force." Since the government anticipated that "large groups of people will disappear underground," the security apparatus is to be massively strengthened. An additional 1,000 positions are to be created with the border police, and the security agencies will be ordered to carry through arbitrary controls on "foreign" looking people, i.e. racial profiling.

The head of Sweden's border police, Patrick Engström, stated that collaboration between the border police and immigration authorities would be intensified in order to strictly enforce deportations. Asylum seekers will only be informed about the rejection of their asylum application in the presence of a police officer.

Since the scale of the planned deportations would overwhelm the currently existing airline routes, the government plans to charter planes to carry out the deportations. According to *Dagens Industri*, government officials are in talks with both countries to establish a repatriation agreement with Morocco and Afghanistan.

Although Sweden seeks to portray itself as a "humanitarian great power," it has repeatedly tightened the screws on refugees over the past year. Mass accommodation centres were systematically overcrowded, and refugees have been housed in churches and mosques. New arrivals were ultimately compelled to sleep in the snow-covered streets.

The Social Democratic-Green government imposed the first restrictions on asylum regulations in November, whereby Sweden "adjusted to the minimum standards of the EU," as Prime Minister Stefan Löfven put it. Since then, successful asylum seekers have been granted only a maximum of three years' residency. Family reunification was restricted, together with the right to health care.

The Social Democrat-Green government exploited the hysteria after the Paris terrorist attacks to introduce identification requirements at the border and biometric checks on refugees. A particularly despicable role was played by the Greens as the smaller partner in the coalition.

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Green chairwoman Asa Romson, who is also deputy prime minister, announced last year's asylum limits in tears and claimed her party would not support any further restriction of the rights of refugees.

But this was utter hypocrisy. At the beginning of January, Sweden told transport companies to check the IDs of travellers entering the country. Since then, the borders have been practically closed for refugees. Now, the mass deportations have been supported by the Greens.

The shift to the right in Sweden's refugee policy is the result of a weeks-long hysterical campaign in which, as in Germany, refugees have been accused of committing sexual assaults on a wide scale and constantly denounced as criminals. Swedish police came under particular criticism by the far right for allegedly sweeping criminal acts by refugees under the carpet.

This racist campaign reached a high point when a 15-year-old Syrian refugee, obviously struggling with the trauma of his experiences during the civil war, stabbed and fatally injured a carer at a mass accommodation centre for refugees.

The debate was driven by the right-wing extremist and anti-immigrant Sweden Democrats, which urged the government to go further in its crackdown on refugees. They saw a "huge demand for personnel" in order to overcome the "refugee problem," as the *Frankfurter Rundschau* put it.

The advance of the far right is above all the result of the disastrous policies pursued by Social Democracy over the past two decades. Unprecedented privatisation programmes and drastic cuts to public spending and welfare have plunged the suburbs of many urban centres into poverty. In some suburbs of Stockholm and Malmö, unemployment is over 15 percent, twice as high as the country's average. Immigrants are disproportionately affected by mass unemployment. The increasing social tensions exploded in violent riots in the suburbs of Stockholm in the summer of 2014, after the police shot a Portuguese immigrant.

Sweden's ruling elite, like those across the continent, has responded to the sharpening social tensions with national chauvinism and the stoking up of anti-immigrant sentiment so as to divide society, prepare the way for the far right and strengthen the police state. The creation of a pogrom-like atmosphere is accompanied by increased militarism. Although Swedish foreign minister Margot Wallström announced that due to the influx of refugees the country "faces collapse" and could not adequately care for the tens of thousands of refugees, the 10 percent increase in defence spending adopted at the beginning of 2014 has been retained.

Wallström also supports the reintroduction of compulsory military service, which was eliminated in 2010. Such a policy would have been, according to Wallström, helpful last autumn in dealing with the refugee influx.

The utter bankruptcy of the Swedish Social Democrats and Greens has above all strengthened the far right. Immediately after the asylum restrictions, they celebrated because the government had "adopted the line of the Sweden Democrats." The Sweden Democrats, who are aligned with other European parties like France's neo-fascist National Front, enjoy the support of 18 percent of voters according to recent polls. Last year there were at least two-dozen cases of arson directed at refugee accommodations in Sweden.

Throughout Europe, the political "left", including the Social Democrats, Greens, and organizations such as the NPA in France and the Left Party in Germany, have fully swallowed the nostrums of the far right, demanding the curtailment of the social rights of refugees and mass deportations.

The effect of these policies has been a humanitarian disaster for refugees and the move toward police-state forms of rule throughout Europe. In its report released Thursday Human Rights Watch declared, "Blatant Islamophobia and shameless demonizing of refugees have become the currency of an increasingly assertive politics of intolerance."

In a damning admission veiled as a humanitarian appeal, the report declared, "The Western governments threatening to curtail rights include many of the strongest traditional allies of the human rights cause."

In other words, the very European governments that have championed the violation of "human rights" as a cause to bomb and invade defenceless countries in Africa and the Middle East, are completely indifferent to "human rights" abuses within their own borders, and are using the refugee crisis to impose police-state measures against their own working populations.

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