

France attacks refugees, launches destruction of Calais camp

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French security forces violently attacked refugees with tear gas Monday as they launched the demolition of the refugee camp in Calais. The assault, launched as Macedonian police assaulted refugees at the Greek border to shut off the Balkan route leading to Germany, testifies to the escalating persecution of refugees throughout Europe.

The administrative court in Lille confirmed on February 25 a request from the Socialist Party (PS) government of President François Hollande to dismantle the southern half of the camp. NGOs working at the camp had counted roughly 3,500 refugees living in this zone. The ultimatum issued to the refugees living in this area to leave before February 23 by Fabienne Buccio, the prefect of police of the Pas de Calais department, had been briefly suspended because of an appeal filed by a number of humanitarian NGOs.

Two weeks ago, the Pas de Calais prefecture had ordered the razing of a 100-metre strip around the portion of the camp near a pathway leading to the port of Calais.

On Monday, heavily armed riot police forced their way into the camp to escort bulldozers that destroyed at least a hundred buildings. They then launched tear gas and attacked hundreds of refugees as well as members of the No Borders aid organisation, while at the same time a dozen buildings in the camp also went up in flames.

The camp's inhabitants and humanitarian NGOs working with them denied official accusations that the refugees themselves had set fire to the buildings, and insisted that fires started because of projectiles thrown by the security forces. Four No Borders members were arrested.

The PS's expulsion of refugees fleeing war-torn

countries like Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, and Pakistan, including women and children, in the middle of winter, during which it is illegal to expel people from their homes, is an act of horrific brutality. The destruction of the Calais camp is a demand long associated to the neo-fascist National Front (FN).

For several days, the government has carried out a sickening propaganda campaign, trying to present its operation to destroy the camp as a "humanitarian" gesture. Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve hypocritically presented the razing of the camp as an action of "protection of the migrants." He insisted it would be done "of course while proceeding in a gradual fashion, and giving the central place to dialogue, persuasion, and giving information to the migrants."

Nonetheless, the PS's stated goal is to use all means necessary to deter migrants seeking to reach the UK from coming to Calais. The demolition of the camp is part of a broader strategy carried out by all the EU governments to discourage people in the Middle East and Africa from fleeing imperialist wars that have devastated their countries.

The Belgian government has reacted to the prospect of the closure of the Calais camp by unilaterally re-establishing border controls with France and "temporarily" suspending the Schengen accords on free movement inside Europe, to prevent refugees from fleeing Calais to Belgium. Cazeneuve called this decision "strange," claiming that the Belgian government had not informed him that they were doing it.

The entire French political establishment is supporting the xenophobic and anti-immigrant policies of the PS, often under a cynical cover of moral support for the refugees.

Reacting to the Pas de Calais prefect's announcement of the evacuation order, Left Front leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon attacked London, which has refused to let the refugees at Calais cross the English Channel and enter Britain.

He advised the French government to send refugees to Britain as soon as possible, knowing full well that even if they left France under these conditions, they would not be allowed to enter Britain or would be immediately expelled.

Mélenchon also took the opportunity to speak for a British exit from Europe, echoing the right-wing nationalist "Brexit" propaganda carried out by reactionary figures such as the right-wing mayor of London, Boris Johnson, and former Labour MP George Galloway.

"Why are we playing at being [Britain's] border guards," while Cameron "is demanding more concessions in Brussels," he asked. "Why shouldn't Britain take her fair share, by what right? ... London is showing no solidarity towards Europe, quite the contrary, so why should we try at all costs to keep Britain in Europe?"

In a letter dated February 25, Michelle Demessine, a Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF) senator from the North region, published a statement in the daily *L'Humanité* warning the government not to carry out an "overly hasty evacuation." She also called for pressure on London to allow immigrants to bring their families to Britain, a principle that the French government has refused to endorse.

The PS's cynical strategy aims to discourage the refugees to the point that they agree to leave France without going to Britain. The French state is applying essentially the same policies applied to the Roma, which it previously expelled to Romania. Now that Romanian Roma are EU citizens, the PS orders the destruction of dozens of Roma camps each year, hoping they will become disgusted and return to Romania on their own initiative.

France has created a virtually impossible situation for immigrant workers. Asylum seekers in France can only work once their case has been processed, which takes an average of nine months. If they want to work during this time, they must do so without papers. Even if they are ultimately accepted as refugees or as immigrants, with France's unemployment rate at 10.5 percent, they

are often forced to take work under the worst conditions.

Even in terms of legal immigration, in 2011 the OECD only counted 211,300 immigrants in France, or 0.33 percent of the population. This was behind Spain (349,300), Britain (321,200), Italy (312,200) and Germany (290,800). As a percentage of the population, France ranks 15th out of 16 European countries in terms of the number of immigrants it admits, surpassing only the Czech Republic.

France refuses most asylum applications. Last year, of 79,100 requests of all origins, only 26,700 or 31.5 percent were accepted. Other asylum seekers were told to leave the country.

This is the result of decades of incitement of the poison of Islamophobia by the French ruling class, often using the rise of the FN as a pretext, to undermine democratic rights and attack the refugees.

At the Munich Security Conference, French prime minister Manuel Valls recently insisted that France would not accept more than 30,000 Syrian refugees. In fact, France has only accepted 10,000 Syrian refugees since that country's civil war began in 2011. Of Valls's quota of 30,000, fewer than a thousand have already arrived.



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