

# **Syriza government uses tear gas and stun grenades against refugees**

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On Wednesday evening Greek police used tear gas and stun grenades against refugees protesting the intolerable conditions prevailing in the makeshift refugee camp near Idomeni. Many women and children were victims of the brutal onslaught.

Police attacked the refugees after around one hundred of them tried to cross the border into Macedonia using a discarded freight car. According to eyewitnesses, the police used so much tear gas and stun grenades that bystanders were also severely affected. Several tents are alleged to have caught fire.

The aid organization “Doctors without Borders” (MSF), which operates in the camp, declared via Twitter, that a provisional women’s hospital had been hit by the attacks and had to be evacuated. The organization was forced to evacuate personnel out of the camp for security reasons.

The crackdown on desperate refugees is the latest and most brutal expression of the despicable politics of the Coalition of the Radical Left (Syriza), which governs the country in coalition with the xenophobic party, Independent Greeks (ANEL).

Prior to the operation, the government had systematically exacerbated the situation in Idomeni. For months now, more than 9,000 desperate refugees, hoping to cross the border into Macedonia and travel further to Northern Europe, have been forced to endure intolerable conditions. Anyone with any remaining money has sought to make their way north, leaving the most destitute, for whom anything is better than repatriation to war zones and poverty, stranded in Idomeni.

The Greek government has deliberately denied the refugees at the Macedonian border any sort of proper food or medical care. Everything painstakingly built up in recent months is the product of the activity of a range

of volunteer groups and charities.

Employees of these groups repeatedly report on the catastrophic supply situation. There is a lack of food, medicine and doctors. After living for months in mud, the refugees are now subject to intense heat, which further intensifies a worsening hygienic crisis.

Greek media have reported on mafia organizations that have formed inside the camp to exploit the plight of the refugees. Brothels have been established where female refugees are abused in exchange for pittances.

This state of affairs is encouraged by the government who are pressuring refugees to quit the camp. In line with the terms of the foul deal struck between the European Union and the Turkish government, Greece is called on to detain refugees in the country in official camps from which most are to be immediately deported to Turkey.

Residents of the camp in Idomeni are refusing to be resettled in the official deportation camps and, in response, Syriza is preparing to evacuate the site. Speaking on Thursday, Giorgos Kyritsis, spokesman for staff at the site, said the camp had to be closed down by early June. The latest police aggression must be regarded as a prelude to expelling the refugees. The camp is already permanently surrounded by police officers.

Conditions for refugees in the official camps are no better. Innocent people are imprisoned like criminals and cut off from the outside. Organizations active in the makeshift camps have refused to work in the prisons. The work there “would make us accomplices of a system we consider to be unfair and inhumane,” declared a representative of “Doctors without Borders”.

Appalling hygiene, heat and inadequate supplies have provoked inmates to conduct protests and riots. At the start of this week, refugees on the Greek island of

Chios and in the Schisto refugee camp in Athens went on hunger strike. “Those with money can cross borders and travel to their desired destinations. But the EU closes its borders for those seeking asylum” read one banner of the hunger strikers.

According to the children’s rights organization Save the Children and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), many unaccompanied children are locked up in the cells of the official camps. Their situation was “depressing and dangerous”, and many were sick. Sometimes the innocent children are held in cells in police stations, where they are denied any exercise and left for weeks without adequate access to bathrooms and toilets.

The police state methods used against the refugees are in fact directed against all workers. Just ten days before the Greek government attacked helpless refugees, its police broke up a demonstration of workers in Syntagma Square in Athens, using tear gas and stun grenades.

The workers had protested peacefully against the drastic welfare cuts adopted by the Greek parliament at the behest of the EU on the same day. Now deputies are discussing further social attacks, in particular the privatization of state enterprises, which will lead to mass layoffs and wage cuts.

To suppress the opposition to its policies, the Syriza government is increasingly relying on police-state measures and repression. Anyone raising their voice against social attacks or against internment and deportation is to be silenced.

Above all it is the violence deployed against helpless and desperate refugees fleeing wars that most clearly exposes the class character of the current government in Greece.



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