

After Calais camp closure

French neo-fascists step up calls for attacks on refugees

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Amid the Socialist Party (PS) government's destruction of the refugee camp in Calais, the neo-fascist National Front (FN) has stepped up its propaganda against refugees in towns and cities across France, where refugees have been transferred to wait in "greeting structures."

On October 17, the FN in the Haute-Pyrénées region published on its Facebook page an aggressive denunciation of the presence of "clandestine migrants" at Lourdes. It gave the addresses where the refugees were located, in a barely veiled attempt to provoke physical attacks against them. This was made clear in comments posted after the announcement, such as "Shoot the sons of b*tches."

In Béziers, the majority of whose municipal council describes itself as "FN-linked" since the 2014 municipal elections, the authorities approved by a large majority on October 19 the holding of a "referendum" on the presence of new refugees in the city.

Earlier in October, Béziers Mayor Robert Ménard had launched an anti-refugee campaign based on doctored photographs showing a mass of refugees in Macedonia getting on a train, whose wagons were marked as having "Béziers" as their destination.

On July 5, the administrative tribunal in Montpellier had already annulled the decision of the municipal council to create a "biterroise guard," that is, a local far-right militia. Ménard had launched his campaign with an online poster aimed at recruiting volunteers, citing the state of emergency in France. In 2015, he had already ordered files to be drawn up on all Muslim schoolchildren in the city's education system.

In September, the administrative tribunal in Grenoble cancelled a decision of the municipal council of Alex

to hold a referendum on whether to install a few refugees in a nearby deserted castle.

The authors of these initiatives enjoy the more or less open support of the political establishment.

In September, the conservative president of the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region, Laurent Wauquiez, called on mayors to refuse to house migrants coming from Calais. The region was supposed to greet 1,784 refugees, according to the national government's resettlement plan.

While the media grant anti-immigrant demonstrations organized by the FN significant and immediate coverage, they are silent about the strong and instinctive sympathy for the migrants from broad masses of youth and of the working population.

They nevertheless felt obliged to report certain demonstrations supporting refugees in recent days, though these were closely monitored and penetrated by political forces determined to prevent the demonstrations from turning into a movement against the PS government's reactionary policies.

There was a demonstration in Marseille on November 4 against anti-immigrant rallies organized by the FN mayor of the 13th and 14th districts of the city, Stéphane Ravier. The FN rally drew only 150 participants, while 350 people joined the counterdemonstration, according to police figures.

The same day, the FN was forced to cancel an anti-refugee demonstration in the city of Saint-Martin d'Heres near Grenoble, due to a counterdemonstration of several hundred people.

On October 23, 2,000 people participated in a rally on Mont Menzenc in Auvergne to protest Wauquiez's opposition to allowing refugees into the region.

In Paris, solidarity demonstrations with migrants took place amid the recent dismantling of the refugee camp on Stalingrad Square. On October 31, a planned mass raid by police against the refugees had to be abandoned due to resistance from the refugees and local residents.

Anti-migrant demonstrations are directly encouraged by the openly anti-refugee policy of the PS government. Its assault on the refugee camp in Calais was not only a fundamental attack on democratic rights, including refugees' rights to asylum, but the realization of one of the principal demands of the neo-fascists.

Besides giving police, over 50 percent of whom vote FN, an even greater role in French politics, this places in the centre of the French presidential election campaign hostility to refugees and migrants—covering up essential questions such as the war drive, unemployment, poverty, social inequality, and attacks on democratic rights such as the state of emergency. This constitutes significant assistance to the neo-fascist party and reinforces it for the presidential campaign.

The campaigns against refugees and the organization or incitement of violence against them are a preparation for attacks on the entire working class.

Pseudo-left organizations such as the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA), the trade unions and their various initiatives such as SOS-Racism (which is closely tied to the PS and the NPA), Ensemble (closely tied to the Stalinist French Communist Party), while claiming to oppose the FN, are ferociously opposed to a mobilization of the working class against the PS in defence of refugees.

Besides their fundamentally nationalist perspective, for decades they all have supported the PS and a policy based on the affluent petty bourgeoisie, based on various forms of identity politics (gender issues, ethnic minorities, separatism), and are viscerally opposed to a political mobilization of the working class against the bourgeoisie.

Their occasional clashes with the FN notwithstanding, they do not present an alternative to the French financial aristocracy's plans to establish a dictatorship, in which the neo-fascists would serve as the political spearhead. On the contrary, they serve to block the emergence of class-based opposition to this policy.

The protests organized by SOS-Racism, the PCF, and Ensemble in Béziers, on the day the municipal council

voted its anti-refugee referendum, is a clear example of this.

Its main perspective was to support municipal officials (including of the PS) who called for the intervention of the national state, the police prefects and the courts. Trying to give credibility to such actions, Ensemble advanced the call for the unity of all “democratic forces.” This is another version of the calls for a “Republican front” advanced by the PS, the conservatives, and other bourgeois parties of government.

This means essentially calling upon the PS, the main architect of anti-refugee policies, and on forces like conservative presidential candidate Alain Juppé, who advances a program of vast attacks on the working class, based on calls for supporting “anyone but the FN.”

There is undoubtedly vast opposition among youth and the population to attacks against refugees, however. The political establishment, including the FN, fears a mobilization of the working class against these attacks—as was made clear by the comments of an FN official, Daniel Lamy, in Marseille's 13th district, which has 19 percent unemployment. On October 25, as refugees arrived in the district, he said, “It would be dangerous however to organize a demonstration [against the refugees] here. Did you see the urban estates next to them?”



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