

Greek fascists attack refugee camp

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Dozens of refugees were forced to flee the Souda refugee camp on the island of Chios last Thursday after a brutal attack by Golden Dawn members.

According to reports, the attack began at around 9:30 pm and lasted until the early hours of the morning. The fascists threw petrol bombs, large boulders and fireworks into the camp from surrounding elevated areas. A 42-year-old Syrian man was assaulted and a Nigerian boy was injured by one of the rocks. Three tents were burnt down and three more were damaged.

Afraid to return to the camp, the refugees that fled slept at the fishing market that night when temperatures dropped to 8 degrees Celsius. Many were still there three days later, according to reports.

On learning of the attacks, a group of aid workers rushed to help the refugees. One of these, Alexandros Panagiotakis, told CNN Greece that the group “came upon around 150 migrants at the fish market where they had sought safety from the far-right attackers. [Another aid worker and I] went to get our cars so that we could transport the migrants to a safer place.”

On their way to get their cars Panagiotakis and his colleague were set upon by a mob of 30 Golden Dawn members, who attacked them verbally and physically. “They threw us down and started to kick and swear at us,” said Panagiotakis. “They stopped only when a riot police squad arrived. They hit me on my sides and legs and the girl [the other aid worker] was semi-conscious. We were taken immediately to hospital.”

Similar attacks had taken place the previous evening, when Golden Dawn members armed with makeshift clubs and crowbars attacked refugees outside the Souda refugee camp while large stones were also thrown into the camp. According to reports a 25 year-old Algerian man is still in intensive care after being hit in the head.

In covering the events, the media lay the blame on the refugees by claiming that the troubles on Wednesday evening began after a group of migrants broke into a

fireworks shop and then reportedly proceeded to set them off towards police and local residents. Refugees who spoke to Greek daily *I Efimerida Ton Syntakton* (*Ef.Syn.*) paint a different picture and claim that the trouble started two hours before when a group of locals attacked a group of Algerians sitting at the Chios public park. “The group had firecrackers and started to throw them [at the refugees] for no reason,” said a Syrian refugee.

The wave of violence was in fact stoked by the visit of Golden Dawn MPs Ilias Kasidiaris and Yiannis Lagos to Chios on Tuesday, where they spoke at a public meeting that evening calling for mass deportations of all refugees and migrants. This was part of a wider tour with a similar event taking place on the neighbouring island of Lesbos. Kasidiaris and Lagos were accompanied by a delegation of parliamentarians from Belgium, members of the Flemish far-right Vlaams Belang party.

There are currently more than 16,000 refugees and migrants being detained in refugee camps on Greek islands in the Aegean, while existing infrastructure is only adequate for around 7,500 people. The overwhelming majority have fled from the imperialist-driven conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. In Chios alone there are 4,000 refugees and migrants--nearly four times more than the current capacity.

Overcrowding is directly linked to the March agreement between the European Union and Turkey, which stipulates that Turkey take back all refugees who come across the Aegean to Greece. As a result, refugee camps in Greece have become internment camps of people--most of whom are destined to be deported back to Turkey after their cases have been assessed. The process is extremely slow, and meanwhile arrivals continue to flow in, which places even more pressure on existing infrastructure. According to figures from

the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), nearly 3,000 people crossed into Greece from Turkey in the last four weeks alone.

The Golden Dawn meetings sought to exploit tensions among sections of the local population, partly due to the increase in petty theft as a result of the economic desperation of the migrant and refugee population and partly due to the effects the refugee crisis has had on the tourist industry, the backbone of the local economy. Their timing was also designed to cause maximum provocation, given that they coincided with the commemoration of the student uprising against the military junta on November 17, 1973.

A counter-protest was held that same evening in Chios, with around 200 people holding a march through the island's main town towards the Grecian Castle Hotel where the Golden Dawn meeting was taking place. The demonstrators' path was blocked by riot police.

According to various accounts from eyewitnesses, the attacks on Wednesday and Thursday were carried out under the nose of the police, despite their having been officially placed on high alert since the Golden Dawn meeting on Tuesday. Riot police only intervened to stop Thursday's attacks on the camp in the early hours of the morning, after they had gone on for five hours. There was a notable delay in police intervening in the attack on the two aid workers, which took place a few metres away from two patrol cars.

Tolerance of far-right attacks by the Greek police, delaying intervention or letting perpetrators get away, is a common occurrence. Golden Dawn enjoys substantial support among officers, especially in riot police units. Three years ago rapper Pavlos Fyssas was murdered in Keratsini by a Golden Dawn member while police stood near-by and did nothing.

The police have arrested none of the perpetrators. The only people arrested so far were 37 refugees and three foreign aid workers during the altercations on Wednesday evening.

In a speech to his parliamentary group, Golden Dawn leader Nikos Michaloliakos openly defended the attacks while railing against the "progressive journalists of this country who lay the blame at the door of far-right elements." He added, "You know what? Yes! For them every Greek that resists is a Golden Dawn member. For us that's a badge of honour. Golden Dawn is the

national defence of Greece."

Like their far-right counterparts throughout Europe, Golden Dawn has been emboldened by the victory of the fascistic Donald Trump in the United States—which Michaloliakos referred to in his speech as "a true victory against globalisation." But if Golden Dawn is able to posture as an anti-establishment party and to exploit social anger by channeling it into the scapegoating of migrants, this is the responsibility of the Syriza-led government. Since betraying his anti-austerity mandate last year, Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras signed a third austerity package with the EU while at the same time enforcing the EU's reactionary refugee policy.



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