

Macron announces stepped-up attacks on immigrants in France

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President Emmanuel Macron's government recently presented a new action plan for refugees and immigrants in France, launched by Prime Minister Edouard Philippe on July 12.

The plan further tightens control of migratory flows in France and Europe. It creates special task forces, intensifies controls in the Mediterranean, reinforces the European border agency Frontex, and increases control capacities in "hot spot" detention camps. It imposes a six-month as opposed to 14-month deadline for the examination of asylum seekers' cases by the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (OFPRA) and the National court of Asylum (CNDA).

This makes clear that the policy of Macron, the former economy minister in President François Hollande's Socialist Party (PS) government, is in direct continuity with the brutal anti-immigrant policies of the PS. Millions of refugees and immigrants are desperately seeking to escape imperialist wars devastating Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, and Somalia, in which the European powers participated alongside the US government for over a quarter century.

According to the UN migration agency report, at least 1,530 refugees died while trying to cross the Mediterranean this year. More than 5,100 refugees drowned in the Mediterranean in 2016. The refugees able to reach European soil confront even more repression from reactionary European governments and appalling living conditions.

During the presidential campaign, Macron presented himself as a more enlightened candidate, notably declaring that France's colonial rule over Algeria was a "crime against humanity." The media and the political establishment used these statements to contrast his

positions with the openly pro-colonial positions of the neo-fascist National Front (FN).

In fact, Macron is intensifying the brutal anti-immigrant policies of the PS, which sent riot police to brutally attack and destroy the so-called "Jungle" refugee camp with over 3,000 immigrants in northern France, at Calais. The PS also shut down a refugee camp in the Stalingrad area in Paris. In neither case did the PS provide the refugees who were thrown onto the street with proper accommodations or residency visas.

Thousands of people, including women and children, have been living in appalling conditions in Paris on sidewalks next to traffic-choked streets and under elevated train bridges and highway overpasses in the Porte de la Chapelle district of Paris. That camp was forcibly evacuated by the security forces earlier this month, under Macron's authority.

Refugees trapped in legal limbo in France have spoken out to the press about the horrific conditions they face. One former Somalian veterinary student said, "I'm exhausted from living on the street. I'm so tired and hungry, but you just have to be patient."

An Afghan youth said, "It has been two months sleeping under a motorway bridge with little water, not much food, some fights between different groups here. You never really sleep. I would queue every day but there was no hope getting into the aid center here. We're humans, we're not animals."

Ali, 29 years old, a teacher from Aleppo, Syria said, "I wanted to live like a human being. I stayed in Syria for four years under the war while things got worse and worse."

Most refugees escaping war and state repression are simply rejected by the OFPRA. Then, they have to re-appeal to CNDA. For this process, refugees must prepare a lawyer and translate their documents into

French. Vulnerable refugees who are living in the streets without any income do not have the thousands of euros that must be spent to carry out this process.

According to the OFPRA, more than 85,244 asylum seekers applied to the OFPRA in 2016. 58,635 were rejected and approximately 27,000 were accepted.

France does not grant refugee status to the small minority of refugees it allows into the country based on considerations of human rights and fundamental democratic rights. Rather, they are chosen based on whether they are highly lucrative for capitalist exploitation. The vast majority of refugees end up working in restaurants, small shops, in construction, cleaning, or working odd jobs for low wages with long hours.

The condition of refugees who do not receive refugee status is even worse, as they are forced to accept all kinds of low-paying, illegal jobs. They get a daily salary of 30 to 50 euros for long hours and no official pay sheets. They are often cheated by the employers, who then refuse to pay their salaries, knowing they cannot complain to the police. Some of them beg in the streets and railway stations. At the same time, they live in fear that they will be deported by authorities back to their war-torn home countries.

Attacks on refugees and immigrants in the advanced countries are an international phenomenon. In the United States and Europe, the political establishment targets the most impoverished and vulnerable refugees in order to divide the working class with anti-immigrant agitation. They use immigrants as scapegoats for the slashing of social benefits and in imposing austerity measures against the working class.

Macron's immigrant action plan uses this reactionary strategy, trying to whip up anti-immigrant sentiment to divert anger over social conditions in France that he is set to worsen with his attacks on labor rights and his legislation imposing a permanent state of emergency. Recently, Macron described the French immigration system as "completely overwhelmed."

This is a clear warning, not only to refugees and immigrants, but also to the entire working class in France and Europe. Macron, working closely with Berlin and the European Union, will only continue and intensify the attacks on democratic rights and the repression of refugees and immigrants.



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