

France launches attack on rights of refugees and immigrant workers

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President Emmanuel Macron is preparing a drastic assault on the rights of refugees and immigrants designed to appeal to nationalist and far-right sentiment in France. Last Thursday, at Orléans, he said, “By the end of the year, I do not want to see anyone in the streets or in the woods anymore.”

Macron’s action plan includes both attacks on democratic rights of refugees and immigrants who have been able to arrive in France, and plans to set up a network of concentration camps in Africa to prevent the majority of refugees from ever arriving to Europe. In this, Macron is continuing the reactionary attacks on refugees and immigrants carried out by France’s previous Socialist Party (PS) government, in which Macron was a minister.

Already, Macron’s prime minister, Edouard Philippe, has announced a new plan of action for refugees and immigrants, which cuts the time for examining immigrants’ asylum and residency cases from 14 months into six months. Those not approved by then could be rapidly deported.

Before they prepare their documents, refugees will be called for an inquiry by the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (OFPRA) and the National Court of Asylum (CNDA). The OFPRA and CNDA reject most cases. Under these conditions, refugees would likely be forced to live without any documents. Today, approximately 400,000 undocumented immigrants live in France under imminent danger of deportation.

Macron’s government also plans to construct detention centres in Libya to block refugees and immigrants from coming to Europe. At these detention centres, OFPRA officials would arrive and examine immigrants’ files to identify the “real refugees.” There can be little doubt that the overwhelming majority of

people will be turned away, and that French officials would only allow in immigrants based on their calculation of the French state’s financial and political interests.

The Italian government already signed an agreement last May with Libya, Niger and Chad to set up similar detention centres. Macron also aims to reinforce the European border agency Frontex in the Mediterranean, where thousands of refugees have drowned in recent years trying to escape countries devastated by poverty and imperialist wars, from Iraq and Syria to Libya and Niger.

Macron’s policy is a reactionary attempt to deal with the consequences of these wars. Millions of innocent people have been killed, and 65.3 million people worldwide have been forced to flee their homes as refugees, the greatest refugee crisis since the end of World War II. Earlier this year, a German intelligence report estimated that over 6 million refugees have arrived in North Africa, hoping to attempt the crossing of the Mediterranean to Europe.

The UN High Commissioner on Refugees issued a report finding that in Libya over 1.3 million refugees or displaced persons are living in appalling conditions, preparing to attempt the dangerous crossing of the Mediterranean Sea to Europe. All suffer from the bloodshed and civil war unleashed by the war waged by the NATO powers, including France, to overthrow the regime of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi in 2011.

Most of them, however, are living in notorious detentions camps run by Western-backed President Fayeze al-Sarraj’s corrupt government, together with various Islamist militias and criminal gangs. According to media reports, 34 detention centres have been identified in Libya, holding between 4,000 and 7,000 detainees each. Refugees are treated as prisoners in

these centres, facing torture, extortion, or even rape and execution. There are reports that women and children face sexual abuse or are sold by their captors. Food, drinking water, health care and education are inadequate.

Last May, UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi visited the Tariq al-Sikka detention camp and commented on the condition of refugees: “I was shocked at the harsh conditions in which refugees and migrants are held, generally due to lack of resources. Children, women and men who have suffered so much already should not have to endure such hardship.”

These are the camps to which Macron will send OFPRA officials to determine who are “real refugees” who can be rescued, and who should be left to rot in misery.

This underscores that Macron’s government is a full participant in the Fortress Europe policy pursued by the European Union (EU) against refugees and immigrants. His main ally in Europe, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and other European governments deployed similar drastic measures to tighten external borders to block refugees’ entry into Europe. They closed the Balkan land route from the Middle East with barbed wire fences last year, and coordinated with Turkey the construction of mass detention camps in Turkey, to block refugees from arriving to Europe.

This also exposes the falseness of arguments that workers were obliged to vote for Macron in the presidential elections because, as a pro-immigrant candidate, he was a “lesser evil” than his opponent, neo-fascist Marine Le Pen. In fact, he bases himself not only on the ruthless oppression of refugees, but on nationalist and anti-immigrant appeals that will inevitably strengthen Le Pen’s National Front.

Two days after announcing his immigration policy, Macron invited the two rival imperialist proxies vying for control of Libya, al-Sarraj and Benghazi-based military strongman Khalifa Haftar, to the château at La Celle-Saint-Cloud, west of Paris. One subject in the talks was how to strengthen the Libyan coast guard, which is tasked with preventing refugees from leaving the Libyan coast. France, Italy and Germany also provide money, military equipment and training to the Libyan military and collaborate in hunting for refugees in the Mediterranean.

While Macron mounts his offensive against refugees in France and in Africa, he is simultaneously launching a new military intervention into Africa’s Sahel region, which includes countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Mauritania and Chad. On July 2, he visited the Malian capital, Bamako, to meet the Malian government, advocating French intervention in the name of the “war on terror.”

Some 5,000 French troops will operate in a new French force deployed to the Sahel, alongside 12,000 UN peacekeeping forces. The various military operations carried out by these new forces will create new waves of refugees seeking to escape these countries.

With as many as 17 million people internally displaced by war and climate change in the Sahel countries, Macron is planning to set up new detention camps in states bordering Libya, including Niger and Chad, to prevent these refugees from coming to Europe.



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