

Macron prepares draconian new French anti-immigrant law

Athiyan Silva
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Last week, French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe announced that his government will present a final bill on refugees and immigrants in the Council of Ministers in February. The bill represents a drastic assault on the right to asylum, effectively handing police authorities the power to deport refugees en masse without any serious hearing whatsoever.

According to the “Presentation of the provisions of the asylum-immigration bill,” the bill cuts the deadline for the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (OFPRA) to examine an asylum application from 120 to 90 days. Crucially, it reduces the time for asylum seekers to appeal a negative decision to the National Asylum Court (CNDA) from 30 to 15 days. It raises the administrative detention for verification of the right to asylum from 16 to 24 hours, and allows a maximum detention of not 45, but 90 or even 115 days.

The new bill creates virtually impossible conditions for asylum seekers and undocumented immigrants trying to get the proper visas or minimum employment in order to live. Above all, with police prefectures taking on average a month to schedule hearings on appeals to the CNDA, the bill would effectively eliminate any recourse to the frequent initial negative decision from the OFPRA.

The bill does not allocate any further resources for the prefectures to process appeals to the CNDA inside the two-week deadline fixed by the bill. Police forces, among which there is broad support for the neo-fascist National Front (FN), are being issued a blank cheque to deport any refugee who, as is often the case, receives an initial negative decision from the OFPRA.

The purpose of the bill is politically criminal: it is to ensure that countless people will be forcibly deported from France back to war-torn and poverty-stricken Middle Eastern or African countries such as Afghanistan or Libya. Afghan Minister for refugees and repatriation, Sayed Hussain Alemi Balkhi, has told the media it was

initially expected that over a “hundred thousand Afghans were to be deported from the European countries in 2017.”

Last month, French Interior Minister Gérard Collomb, in an interview with RTL Radio, stated that the situation with the growing numbers of refugees in Paris is explosive. “In Germany, about 300,000 people have been denied asylum, they want to come to France. Are we taking them all? No.” In order to block the flow of refugees, France, and all the major European countries, are preparing a wave of repressive laws paving the way for indiscriminate mass deportations.

President Emmanuel Macron’s attack on the democratic right to asylum is part of an assault on refugees waged by the entire European Union (EU). After decades of imperialist wars in Africa and the Middle East provoked the greatest refugee crisis since the end of World War II, with over 60 million people displaced, the EU is keeping them from coming to Europe by trampling their democratic rights.

EU countries, including France, Germany, Austria, Italy, Greece and Belgium, have reintroduced border controls, even inside the Schengen zone where border controls were initially eliminated. The European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) intensified its border control on land and sea, deploying ships, aircraft, helicopters, high tech equipment and 1500 officials. At the same time, since 2014, 15,486 refugees have drowned at sea.

The European bourgeoisie is also working with the reactionary ruling classes in the Middle East and Africa to build a network of concentration camps in which hundreds of thousands of people are trapped.

Last month, Amnesty International published a report detailing how the EU is spending millions of euros to build up a network of detention camps in Libya, in which refugees are beaten, tortured, sexually assaulted, sold into

slavery, and even murdered. Italian foreign minister Angelino Alfano met the UN-sponsored Libyan government's Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj in Tripoli last December to work out an agreement for Italian warships to aid the Libyan coastguard in blocking refugees in the Mediterranean Sea. Refugees are then sent back to these camps.

The EU Commission has already paid €100 million to the Sudanese government to mount army patrols on the borders with Libya and Egypt, and keep refugees from Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea on African soil. Sudanese forces are notorious for human rights violations.

Macron is also intensifying the war in former French colonies in Africa, with a 4,000-strong French force fighting in Ivory Coast, Mali, Chad, Niger, Burkina Faso and across the entire Sahel region, alongside a 12,000-strong UN peacekeeping force as part of the "war on terror." These French imperialist interventions will create millions more refugees.

These developments point above all to the political bankruptcy of arguments advanced last year, during the presidential elections, that workers and youth should vote for Macron against FN candidate Marine Le Pen in order to defend immigrants' rights. Countless forces, from Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Unsubmissive France to the New Anti-capitalist Party, accommodated themselves to claims that Macron was a "lesser evil" than Le Pen.

These forces now stand exposed as political enemies of immigrants' rights, as Macron and his government intensify attacks against refugees and immigrants, seeking support from far-right forces, including the FN.

Last Tuesday, Macron visited the northern coastal city Calais, where thousands of refugees are living in inhuman conditions in the "Jungle camp," as they attempt to travel on to Britain. He insisted that refugees should not come to France, and threatened those in Calais: "To stay in Calais and build makeshift shelters and even set up squats is a dead end. The border is closed and Calais can no longer be a destination for migrants."



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