

French immigration bill attacks right to asylum

Athiyan Silva
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On April 22, the French National Assembly passed the repressive Asylum-Immigration Bill by a vote of 228-139, with 24 abstentions. The Assembly discussed this politically criminal bill for seven days before passing it. The measure tramples on the fundamental democratic right to asylum, allowing police to detain asylum seekers without charge for up to four months, deny them appeal hearings, and deport them back to their war-torn countries.

Significantly, though the neo-fascist National Front (FN) voted against the bill as a whole, it voted for the provision restricting appeals of deportation proceedings.

The bill was passed despite broad popular opposition. Thousands marched against the measure in cities including Paris, Lyon, Rennes, Caen, Montpellier, Valence, Toulouse, Grenoble, Bourges, Briançon, Avignon, Lille and Calais. Lawyers and administrative staff of the national asylum court struck for several days.

The bill is bound up with expanding imperialist wars across the Middle East and Africa and the turn to authoritarian forms of rule in France and across Europe. Interior Minister Gerard Collomb first presented the bill in the Assembly just two days before Paris, along with Washington and London, launched illegal missile strikes against Syria. With Trump threatening to suspend the Iranian nuclear treaty, the NATO powers are expecting an even broader flow of refugees after tens of millions have already been displaced by their wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Yemen and beyond.

This bill cuts the period 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. Since police prefectures typically take a month to schedule appeal hearings, this would effectively allow the police to rapidly expel refugees after a negative OFPRA ruling. Refugees are to be denied sufficient time to obtain a lawyer and interpreter and raise funds.

The bill increases the administrative detention period from 16 to 24 hours and allows the maximum period of incarceration in notorious administrative detention centres to be increased from 45 to 135 days. Children are to be held in these centres with their families. Last year, 275 children were detained.

The bill strengthens existing French immigration law, which punishes people who facilitate illegal entry, movement or residence of refugees in France. The bill allows for sentences of up to five years in prison and a fine of €30,000 for using false identification papers.

It also intensifies checks by border patrol and customs officers on immigrants in migrant and homeless shelters, in subway stations and on the street. Since the imposition of the state of emergency in France three years ago, thousands of troops and heavily armed police are permanently deployed across the country. The European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) is also intensifying its border controls on land and sea, deploying ships, aircraft, helicopters and high-tech equipment, condemning thousands to drown in the Mediterranean before they reach Fortress Europe.

Refugees and undocumented immigrants are to be obliged to stay at a place stated as their residence for a fixed number of hours each day. This helps the police track them and, if necessary, deport them back to the countries they fled.

French President Macron, who is waging wars in

Afghanistan, the Middle East and Mali, said arrogantly in an interview with BFMTV last month, “We cannot take in all the misery of the world.” According to media estimates, France forcibly deported some 26,000 immigrants last year, a 14 percent increase over the previous year.

The Macron government’s rhetoric on the law was virtually impossible to distinguish from the anti-immigrant rhetoric of the FN. Interior Minister Gérard Collomb, as he introduced the bill in the National Assembly, claimed that it was necessary because regions of France “are falling apart because they are submerged by a flood of asylum seekers.” He claimed that if this continued, “we should not be surprised tomorrow if certain excesses take place in our country.”

This immigration law is a political exposure of all those who argued that in last year’s presidential election voters had to support Macron, who was backed by the European Union, against FN candidate Marine Le Pen in order to protect immigrants’ rights. In fact, as Macron rams through social attacks on the working class, bombs Syria and prepares for even broader wars, he is predictably turning to the right on immigration.

He is calling for a return of the military draft and plans to spend €300 billion on the army over the next six years. He is aligning himself with sections of the ruling class that believe a fascistic, anti-immigrant atmosphere is the only way to push through the militarist policy of French imperialism.

In particular, the immigration law exposes numerous forces, including Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s Unsubmissive France (LFI) and the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA), which accommodated themselves to media claims that Macron was a “lesser evil” to Le Pen. They are politically implicated in Macron’s attacks on immigrants’ rights.

After the bill passed in the Assembly, Mélenchon shed a few crocodile tears, complaining that the new bill was “barbaric.” This demonstrates only the political hypocrisy of Mélenchon, who called in 2012 for a vote for Socialist Party presidential candidate François Hollande, who went on to wage war in Syria and Mali, impose austerity measures, and deport tens of thousands of Roma from France.

In the 2017 presidential election, despite receiving more than 7 million votes in the first round, Mélenchon helped Macron win the election. In the second round,

he and the NPA refused to take a position on whether workers and youth should vote for Macron against FN candidate Marine Le Pen.

Their abdication of their political responsibilities to the millions of people who voted for them to express their left-wing opposition to Macron allowed the media to promote virtually unchallenged the lie that Macron was the democratic alternative to Le Pen. The *Parti de l’égalité socialiste*, the French section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, was the only party that called for an active boycott of the second round. It insisted that this was the best way to prepare a struggle of the working class against the reactionary policies of whichever candidate won.



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