

Persecution of refugees mounts after passage of French asylum law

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Since the passage last month of President Emmanuel Macron's draconian bill on asylum and immigration in the French National Assembly, there is mounting anger and fear among refugees and undocumented immigrants in France. The law effectively undermines the right to asylum, by drastically cutting the time refugees have to appeal deportation orders, while increasing the length of time police can detain refugees.

Now, refugees fleeing imperialist wars waged by NATO countries including France—such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Libya, Syria, and Mali—are increasingly angry and afraid of French police. Under these conditions, WSWS reporters visited the makeshift camps in Paris, where 3,000 refugees, mostly youth born after the Gulf War against Iraq in 1991, are stacked together in inhuman conditions.

The first large refugee camp is composed of hundreds of two-person tents, lined up side by side like small nests along the Paris ring road (*périphérique*) and under nearby road bridges near La Villette park in the 19th district of Paris. The environment is contaminated: Mattresses are dirty and infested with bedbugs, there are only two toilets and two small water pipes for hundreds of people, and the refugees are forced to wait for volunteers to distribute food, clothes and other essential items. Many people use cold water from the Canal Saint-Denis to brush their teeth and clean their clothes.

Refugees at the camp—who largely come from Somalia, Sudan and Eritrea—were very reluctant to speak and afraid of police repression. One refugee told the WSWS, “The government has nothing to do to help any of us. Look here! This is the real Paris. We are sleeping in the streets in terrible conditions!”

Most of the refugees have lost hope that they could obtain a permanent resident visa and try to obtain a

better life in France, and are angry at the French political establishment. One man from Somalia said only, “We are in the street, there is nothing for us here, God alone must save us.”

The second large camp was set up along the Saint-Martin canal in the 10th district of Paris, approximately 2 kilometres from the La Villette camp. Most of the refugees staying in this camp are Afghan men aged between 18 and 35, who are forced to live in the camps under constant fear of police harassment and repression. They cannot walk around or sleep peacefully, either by day or by night.

A 26-year-old Afghan man who lost five family members in a US attack on Jalalabad last year spoke to the WSWS. He said, “I have lost my family. The Americans came at night and shot my father, mother, two brothers and my sister. When this occurred, I was at my uncle's house, and they also killed 30 people in my village. After that, I left Afghanistan.”

Asked about what the French government has done to help refugees, he said: “I am coming here to save my life, not to earn money, but the government does not help us at all. Here there is no good life, no good food. If you walk on the streets, the police demands your papers; if we don't have them, they take us to a police station and put us in custody for 5 to 6 hours in a small room with a smelly toilet.”

He added, “Some people bring us food and other items every evening and morning. With their help, we are able to continue to live here.”

However, police are increasingly persecuting and fining volunteers who provide food, water and other essential items to refugees in Paris. Last month, Solidarité-Migrants volunteer Laurence Ariste told the media: “They gave us two fines of €135 each, because we had two cars. They said you can't distribute here.

We're a small organisation. We don't have much money. If they give us these fines every time we can't continue like this."

Also, last year, police violently expelled people from refugee camps in the streets of the Porte de la Chapelle area of Paris, stealing refugees' belongings, including sleeping bags and blankets. Men, women and children were tear-gassed by police.

Only two weeks ago, two young refugees without papers drowned and died in the Saint-Martin and Saint-Denis canals; one was from Somalia and the other from Afghanistan.

Minors struggle in particular to prove they are under the age of 18 in age assessment centres. The rejection rate of youth without accepted government photo ID at the age assessment centres is around 80 percent. Many minors spend months trying to prove their age, under conditions where it is impossible to obtain appropriate documents from war-torn countries, and end up on the streets after government authorities refuse them housing.

Under Socialist Party (PS) Mayor Anne Hidalgo, the Porte de la Chapelle welcome area (CPA), commonly known as "la Bulle" (the bubble) after the previous PS national government opened it, has been closed. Refugees who temporarily stayed there are in the streets. Macron is reportedly planning to replace the "Bulle" with five Centres for Reception and Review of the Situation (CAES) in the 18th district of Paris, Ris-Orangis, Cergy, Hauts-de-Seine and Seine-et-Marne. Refugees in Paris fear that these camps are traps for them and try to avoid going there to escape being deported back to their war-torn countries.

Last year, 100,412 refugees applied to France's OFPRA (Office of Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons), but only 13,020 obtained refugee status; 10,985 got subsidiary protection. Sixty-five thousand three hundred and two were rejected outright. This points to the vast scale of the crisis, even before the implementation of Macron's new draconian asylum and immigration bill. The new law has further aggravated the conditions for asylum seekers, who now have only 15 days to appeal a refusal to the National Asylum Court (CNDA). This is not long enough to prepare an appeals file.

Such are the reactionary attacks of the Macron government, which is taking as its own the anti-

immigrant rhetoric and policies of the neo-fascist National Front. In November 2017, an estimated 300,000 illegal immigrants and refugees lived in France. This is only 0.5 percent of the French population. The Macron government and neo-fascist forces like the FN are stirring up anti-immigrant hatred to divide the working class and promote unpopular policies of austerity and war



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