

# Clashing with Rome, Paris persecutes refugees at Italian border

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French President Emmanuel Macron is escalating his the offensive against immigrants and refugees in Europe after meeting with Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte on Friday in Paris. After briefly criticizing the Italian government earlier this week over its cruel and sadistic refusal to allow the *Aquarius* and its 629 refugees to land in Italy, Macron called on European Union (EU) countries to make “profound reforms” in order to toughen EU asylum law.

Every sign indicates that the European powers are preparing enormous new attacks on immigrants across the continent. The clash came after last month’s installation of a new Italian government dominated by the far-right Lega party of Matteo Salvini that has pledged to deport a half-million immigrants—mass deportations that would require a police crackdown without precedent since the end of World War II. At the same time, French police are intensifying their illegal persecution of refugees, including unaccompanied children, along the Italian-French border.

Three days before the Paris summit meeting, Macron had attacked Rome for refusing the *Aquarius* permission to dock in Italian ports, accusing it of “cynicism and irresponsibility.” This provoked a diplomatic spat with the Conte government, which summoned the French Ambassador to Italy, Catherine Colonna, to protest. Italian Economy Minister Giovanni Tria canceled a planned trip to Paris, and Salvini as interior minister sharply denounced Macron’s statement.

“The problem is that our history in terms of generosity and voluntarism does not deserve to be lectured so severely by French government representatives who, I hope and believe, will present official apologies as soon as possible,” Salvini said. “If official apologies are not forthcoming, Prime Minister Conte would do well not to go to France.”

The spat between Paris and Rome took place as a major

crisis erupted inside the German government, also triggered by the issue of immigration. Meeting with both Salvini and Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz, German Interior Minister Horst Seehofer threatened to defy Chancellor Angela Merkel and close German borders, risking a collapse of the German government.

In the event, however, Conte went to Paris on Friday and held a friendly press conference with Macron, where both men laid out their plans for attacks on refugees. Both called for changes to the Dublin accord, which mandates that the EU country where an asylum seeker first arrives handles his or her asylum application. While Conte said Italy is “opposed” to the system, Macron said he wanted a “refoundation” of the system “to better adapt it to the realities of each country.”

While Macron called for reinforcing the EU’s Frontex border agency, Conte called for a bilateral Franco-Italian summit meeting “in the autumn” in Rome.

There are growing signs that the upcoming EU summit at the end of June will feature new attempts by the various EU powers to change EU asylum rules and drastically step up attacks on migrants. The Macron government has passed a draconian asylum law that effectively gives police veto power over asylum applicants’ files, as France mounts mass deportations of tens of thousands of refugees each year. However, Rome and Paris are clearly pressing to step up these fascist attacks.

Macron and Conte both urged to EU to create more so-called “hotspot” camps, that is, concentration camps in North Africa where hundreds of thousands or million of refugees can be detained. Conte said, “We should create European centers in the countries of departure” to block an “exodus” of migrants towards Europe. Macron supported Conte’s reactionary plan, calling on “branches of our asylum agencies to tackle this question on the other side of the Mediterranean Sea.”

In fact, the “centers” proposed by Conte and Macron

are hellish, EU-funded prison camps set up in Libya after the 2011 NATO war to detain masses of Middle Eastern and African migrants fleeing imperialist wars and grinding poverty. After UN officials reported on the mass resort to torture, sexual violence and murder in Libyan camps and CNN broadcast a video of African migrants being sold as slaves in the camps, Amnesty International published a harrowing report on them last year. It confirmed that the EU is funding camps where these atrocities are committed.

Further camps are being set up in Chad, Niger, Morocco and in countries across North Africa, to block masses of refugees from attempting the hazardous Mediterranean crossing to Europe.

The row between Paris and Rome reflects bitter struggles erupting inside the European ruling class over the fate of the EU and its global policy. The refugee question plays an enormous role in this crisis. Decades of US-led imperialist wars have devastated entire countries and regions—from Iraq to Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Mali, Burkina Faso and beyond—killing millions and forcing tens of millions to flee their homes. Ten to fifteen thousand refugees have drowned in the Mediterranean, provoking horror and outrage among millions of workers across Europe.

The deepening crisis of relations with the United States, the recent collapse of the G7 summit talks with Washington, and initial US trade war measures against Europe are accelerating these political conflicts inside the European bourgeoisie, as it seeks to fashion a new, militarist and anti-immigrant politics in order to push through European militarist policy.

The European powers are haggling over how to divide the limited numbers of refugees and asylum seekers they will admit. At the press conference with Conte, Macron said that “if Austria, Hungary and some others, thanks to these special contacts, can provide more of the solidarity that Italy needs, it’s very good news for Italy and for everyone.” Seehofer, for his part, called on Austria and Italy to “ally themselves with Germany to work at the interior minister level on security and immigration.”

Macron’s anti-immigrant stance and his ties with the far-right Italian government are a further vindication of the Socialist Equality Party of France’s stance in last year’s presidential elections.

It insisted that workers could not support Macron as a lesser evil than neo-fascist candidate Marine Le Pen, based on claims, for example, that Le Pen would be more hostile to immigrants than Macron. Rather, the SEP

insisted that the task was to mobilize independent opposition to both candidates and give revolutionary leadership to the movement in the working class that would erupt again—as indeed it has, with masses of strikes and protests particularly since the beginning of this year.

Similarly, neither the more explicitly nationalist Italian government nor the Macron government, which seeks to coordinate its persecution of immigrants more broadly through the institutions of the EU, have anything progressive to offer to masses of workers and youth.

One indication of this are the terrible reports about French police abusing immigrants, including immigrant children, that are emerging along the Franco-Italian border in the Alps, as refugees try to flee across the border from Italy to France. The Italian government protested to the French government earlier this year that French police had violated Italian sovereignty by crossing over into Italy to dump refugees back on the other side.

Last week, new reports emerged from Oxfam that French border guards along the Italian border in the Alps near Ventimiglia are abusing, detaining and illegally deporting back to Italy children as young as 12. They are also cutting the soles of children’s shoes, stealing their mobile phones’ SIM cards, and refusing shelter, schooling, and access to clean water, toilets and medical care to minors, including pregnant teenagers.

“Children, women and men fleeing persecution and war should not suffer further abuse and neglect at the hands of the authorities in France and Italy,” commented Oxfam’s Elisa Bacciotti, adding, “Children should never be kept in jail cells or subjected to cruel abuse.”



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