

Syriza government authorises mass evictions of refugees and asylum seekers

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Hundreds of people gathered April 22 at the central square of Mytilene—the capital of the island of Lesbos—for a silent protest to mark the first anniversary of a far right attack on a group of mainly Afghan asylum seekers.

The asylum seekers, who included women and children, had gathered in the square to protest their internment at the Moria detention camp on the island and the delay in processing their asylum applications. They were then attacked by a fascist mob of around 200 under the nose of police units in the area, who reportedly had orders not to move against the thugs but only to disperse them. As a result, the mob was able to break through a police cordon and throw stones, bottles and flares at the asylum seekers, resulting in 35 people being injured.

The protest was organised by “Democratic Mytilene,” a local pseudo-left coalition made up primarily of Syriza and Popular Unity members, which was founded earlier this year to contest the upcoming local government elections. The group stated that “[a] year on after the events of those days, the culprits as well as their moral instigators remain unpunished. However, with their actions they continue to poison society, divide citizens and provoke hatred with their lies.”

In fact, chief among the “moral instigators” is Syriza.

As far right politics are being ever more openly adopted by the ruling elites of Europe, and fascistic movements encouraged, Syriza has only been too happy to lend its services to this effort.

In the four years since it took power in January 2015, Syriza has not only played a pivotal role in continuing and deepening the EU-dictated austerity that has pauperised millions of Greeks, but has also been at the forefront of cracking down on refugees, asylum seekers

and migrants as part of the European Union’s (EU) anti-immigrant agenda.

There are currently more than 70,000 refugees interned in Greece in overcrowded camps on the mainland and islands as a result of the filthy deal cut between the EU and Turkey in 2016, which stipulates that all refugees crossing into Greece from Turkey be interned until their case is processed—with the plan that they are ultimately deported back to Turkey. For this, Athens has received more than €2 billion euros from the EU and Turkey is set to receive €6 billion euros.

Over 7,000 of these refugees are detained at the Moria camp, whose capacity is for around 2,000.

The atrocious conditions at Moria were highlighted in an Oxfam report published this January, which included testimonials from aid workers as well as asylum seekers detained at the camp.

Sonia Andreu, who manages “Bashira,” a refuge for vulnerable women asylum seekers on Lesbos, told Oxfam that she sees Moria “as hell.”

“I know women,” she said, “who gave birth, they had a C-section delivery and after four days they were returned to Moria with their newborn babies. They have to recover under dirty, unhealthy conditions.”

“It’s really difficult to see a doctor,” said Shala, an Afghan refugee in her mid-forties. “There is just one doctor for the whole camp. You have to be on your death bed before they take your problems seriously.”

According to Oxfam, there was no doctor at all for the whole of November after the camp doctor quit.

The report also highlighted the unsanitary conditions that exist as a result of overcrowding. “70 people have to share one toilet, so hygiene is very bad,” said John, an NGO worker in Lesbos. “There are many small children and babies in the camp. Sometimes people do not even have a tent and winter is coming. In the Olive

Grove, there are snakes, scorpions and rats.”

Three days before the silent protest in Lesbos, 60 refugees set up a camp at Syntagma Square in Athens, opposite the Greek parliament. They made handmade placards castigating their treatment, with some reading, “Evicted by police government” and “Why make us live in tents when there are so many empty buildings?”

They were protesting their recent forced eviction on April 18 from the “Clandestina” and “Cyclopi” squats in the Exarchia district of Athens—driven out by helmeted and masked riot police. The 68 people, including 25 children, had been occupying the squats for around a year. Just one week previously, the “Azadi” and “Babylonia” squats, also in Exarchia, were evicted by around 200 riot police on April 11. During the evictions at the four locations, an estimated 200-300 refugees were made homeless.

Quoted in a post appearing on *infomobile*, a blog reporting on the plight of refugees in Greece, a mother of three children described her eviction from the Clandestina squat: “I was sleeping with my children, when I suddenly woke up with guns being held in front of my eyes. There was police everywhere. I tried to collect our most important belongings. The police was shouting: ‘Fast, fast!’ Two of my kids have heart problems. One of them has asthma.”

Another refugee and former resident of Clandestina told *infomobile*, “Everything I had is in that locked building now: My tax number, my social insurance documents, medical papers... I am at zero again. They didn’t let us take anything.”

A statement released by the Ministry for Migration Policy showed the government’s contempt for the refugees, stating that by refusing to leave Syntagma Square they “were creating a negative image of themselves among Greek public opinion.”

The camp at Syntagma was cleared on April 20 after refugees were reportedly transported to different detention centres across the country.

Exarchia has been under what is a semi-permanent occupation by state forces for weeks, with Syriza authorising such operations in order to project itself as the responsible party of law and order. Responding to the evictions on social media, Syriza deputy minister for Citizen Protection, Katernia Papakosta-Sidiropoulou, wrote, “Well done to the Greek Police for the latest, well organised operation in Exarchia.

Policemen performed a check mate. They proved that they don’t wait for the month of August [when most people are on vacation] to ensure the safety of citizens.”

The evictions in Exarchia are the culmination of months of saturated reports in the Greek media on alleged criminal activity in the area, such as alleged contraband and drug trafficking operations run by migrant gangs in collaboration with anarchist groups, who have had a long presence in the district. This reportage is solely aimed at demonising refugees and asylum seekers, accompanied by the usual law-and-order chorus to clamp down on the “no-go zone” of Exarchia.

Behind the evictions there are wider commercial considerations, with the district being part of recently unveiled plans to regenerate the city centre. A February article in the pro-business *capital.gr*, stated that “Anaplasti PLC, whose aim is to implement urban revitalisation works, is investigating in conjunction with Attica Metro, three new scenarios of where to place a Metro stop in Exarchia, aiming to preserve the public space of Exarchia Square, which today is a haven for criminal activities.”

Exarchia, along with other run-down areas in the city centre, are seen by many investors as prime real estate and they are snapping up properties there. Speaking to the *in.gr* website Lefteris Potamianos, president of the Athens-Attica real estate agents’ association, stated that real estate prices in the district have gone up by 30 percent in the last year: “It’s not just apartments, but strangely also whole blocks that have been bought up and are being earmarked for airbnb apartments or hotels. All these sales have happened in the last year.”



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