

The Moria catastrophe and the European Union's war on refugees

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On the Greek island of Lesbos, a human tragedy is playing out before the eyes of the world. The 13,000 refugees who have been left homeless and stranded on the island since the Moria camp burned down are being denied all assistance. They sleep in the open air on roads and have no access to drinking water or food. If they protest against this barbaric treatment, the police attack them with tear gas.

“The EU always talks about human rights, but they are treating us like rubbish,” Taheri, a youth who fled Afghanistan with his family, told Germany’s *Der Spiegel*.

The inhumane treatment and humiliation of these despairing people cannot simply be explained as the result of indifference to their fate. It is a product of a deliberate policy pursued by the European Union (EU) and its member states. Refugees are being intentionally mistreated to deter others from attempting to reach Europe. For this same reason, the EU allows thousands of migrants to drown in the Mediterranean each year.

The horrifying pictures from Lesbos expose the brutality of “Fortress Europe.” The worthlessness of the “European values” often invoked by Berlin, Paris, and Brussels to attack Russia and China, or wage war in defence of “human rights,” has been laid bare for all to see. The demands raised by the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), Lega and other fascistic organisations are being implemented by the EU.

Europe’s ruling circles will use the same ruthlessness they are currently displaying towards refugees to suppress anyone who challenges their wealth and power. Under conditions of the deepest economic crisis since the 1930s, they are preparing for bitter class battles. The defence of the refugees is therefore not merely an elementary humanitarian obligation. It is necessary to defend the democratic rights and social achievements of the entire working class.

Leading European politicians have openly admitted that they welcome the deterrent provided by the images from Lesbos. “We must now try to avoid sending out signals that could cause a chain reaction we could not control,” stated Austria’s foreign minister, Alexander Schallenberg, by way of justifying his government’s refusal to accept any refugees from Lesbos.

The German government argued along similar lines. Berlin has warned about a “pull effect,” insisted that a new camp must be built on Lesbos and concealed its inaction behind demands for a “European solution.” But they know full well that this will never come to pass, since the Hungarian, Polish and other far-right European governments firmly reject accepting any refugees.

The German government’s offer to accept between 100 and 150 children and an additional 1,500 refugees, most of whom are families, is a sham. Its aim is above all to contain the widespread outrage over

what is happening on Lesbos. The government already promised to accept the children earlier this year. The same applies to families with children, whom the government are now allegedly “seeking.”

German responsibility

The reality is that the German government and its European partners bear chief responsibility for the misery and mass deaths on Europe’s external borders. German Interior Minister Horst Seehofer is supporting his party colleague, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, who is doing all he can to make life a living hell for the refugees.

Mitsotakis has accused the refugees of setting fire to the camp themselves in order to be able to leave Lesbos. A Greek government spokesman declared, “They thought if they just set fire to Moria, they would be able to leave the island. We tell them bluntly: they can forget it.”

Even prior to the fire in Moria, life for the refugees was “hell on earth.” Jean Ziegler, the Swiss former UN special rapporteur for the right to food, described the conditions in February 2020 as follows: “Everything I have seen in the slums around the world pales in comparison to what I experienced in Moria. Human rights are being violated in the camp at every turn, total despair is all-pervasive. The malefactors in Brussels are allowing conditions of survival to develop in the hot spots that recall the deplorable concentration camps and hope in this way to drain the flood of refugees.”

The refugees are now literally left with nothing. They are forced to camp in the dirt without tents or blankets. The police fire tear gas at them. They are refusing to allow aid organisations to access the homeless refugees, who are desperately searching for food, and force volunteers to dispose of meals that have already been prepared for them.

This apocalyptic situation is impacting the refugees ever more severely. The aid organisation Mission Lifeline reported on Twitter of “children with severe injuries and helpless parents.” The Greek police fired “fist-sized metal objects full of tear gas at children.”

The Greek government has now begun constructing a new camp for the refugees at Kara Tepe, a former military training ground on Lesbos. However, only about 500 refugees have been accommodated there thus far. Many are terrified that they will experience the same inhumane treatment there as in Moria, and that they will be forced to spend the coming cold and wet winter in tents.

Surrounded by NATO barbed wire, the camp resembles a prison and conditions within are similar: curfews, inadequate medical services and the isolation of people who test positive for COVID-19. Even so, the threat of an uncontrolled spread of the coronavirus remains in Kara Tepe, just like in Moria. Seven of the first 300 refugees accepted into the camp have tested positive for COVID-19.

A product of the dirty deal with Turkey

The concept for the Moria camp was developed in Germany, and it was established and operated with the help of the EU. It is the direct product of the dirty deal negotiated by German Chancellor Angela Merkel with Turkey in 2016.

At the time, the EU obligated the Greek Syriza government to establish camps on Aegean Sea islands that were euphemistically referred to as “hot spots.” Their role was to capture, register and deport as soon as possible refugees who successfully made the sea crossing from Turkey to Greece. At the same time, the coastguard was significantly strengthened and NATO warships were sent to the eastern Mediterranean to deter refugees.

The agreement with Turkey intentionally violated the right of each person to have an individual review of their reasons for seeking asylum so as to facilitate the mass deportation of refugees. The German government and EU sent several liaison officials and employees of the EU border agency Frontex to Greece in order to swiftly process the asylum applications. Many of the rejections were so obviously unlawful that Greek judges subsequently overturned them.

At the same time, the EU refused to accept the same number of refugees from Turkey as had been deported, which was one of the conditions of the agreement. The agreement was thus reduced to the miserable core of Turkey blocking all refugees from reaching Greece and Greece refusing to allow any refugees to travel to other European countries.

The hot spots on the Aegean islands, which had originally only been intended for refugees to stay in for a week, were transformed into permanent internment camps in which living conditions became ever more life-threatening and inhumane. The number of internees grew. Already in 2018, the containers in Moria were no longer adequate to house everyone. In a neighbouring olive grove, wooden huts and tents were erected for the refugees. At that time, 6,000 refugees were living in a legal vacuum from which there was no escape.

The situation then worsened dramatically in Moria in late 2019. Around 30,000 refugees successfully reached Greece in dinghies during the autumn, and they were subsequently confined to the camps. By March 2020, around 20,000 people lived in and around Moria. Food and water became scarce and were rationed. Internees had to queue for hours to get a meal or go to the toilet. The power supply regularly collapsed, and the coronavirus pandemic was already threatening to erupt.

All experts clearly understood that the virus would spread among the camp internees uncontrolled once it emerged. But the Greek government did not respond by evacuating the camp. Instead, it reduced the number of active aid organisations and imposed strict curfews.

COVID-19 was then detected in one refugee in early September.

The virus spread rapidly throughout the overcrowded camp. Shortly thereafter, 35 infections had been registered. The total curfew that was then imposed and the reduction of medical care to emergency ambulance services triggered unrest. Ultimately, a fire destroyed the entire camp.

EU toughens refugee policy

The German government and EU have responded to the self-made catastrophe in Moria by adopting an even harder line on refugee policy.

At a joint press conference on Friday, Interior Minister Horst Seehofer and EU Commission Vice President Margaritis Schinas presented the key points of the EU’s new refugee policy. According to them, refugee camps on Europe’s external borders should be funded and operated by the EU itself.

“Moria no longer exists,” said Schinas. “That’s why it is clear that the Greek authorities must quickly establish a new institution that is modern, that is a centre with all of the necessary facilities to identify and process asylum cases.”

This will see the accelerated implementation of plans presented by Seehofer to the EU last summer. They include extra-territorial internment camps on the external borders where legal proceedings and the Geneva Conventions for Refugees will be effectively suspended.

Instead of evacuating them, Seehofer is threatening the refugees with a Moria 2.0! The spiral of deterrence set into motion by the EU in its struggle against refugees is being pushed to a new stage. It can already be expected that in a relatively short period, the conditions in the newly established EU camps will be even worse than those in Moria.

The “common European solution” being sought by Berlin, Paris, Brussels and Rome is focused on intensifying the war on refugees and driving them out of Europe. There is no room for the millions of people fleeing war, hunger and poverty out of pure desperation.



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