

Turkey plans deportation of 1 million Syrian refugees

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As a far-right anti-refugee campaign in Turkey has intensified in recent weeks, President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an’s government has decided to deport 1 million Syrian refugees back to Syria, where NATO’s proxy war for regime change continues to rage.

Speaking via remote connection to a conference in Idlib, the northwest province of Syria occupied by Turkish forces and their Islamist proxies, Erdo?an said: “We are preparing a new project to enable the voluntary return of 1 million Syrian brothers and sisters we have hosted in our country. We will implement this project with the support of domestic and international non-governmental organizations.”

He added, “About 500,000 Syrians have returned to the safe zones created since 2016, when Turkey launched its cross-border operations amid a deepening humanitarian tragedy in Syria.”

The “humanitarian tragedy” Erdo?an speaks of, in fact, is a product of the US-NATO imperialist war, which the Turkish government has supported since 2011, to topple the Russian- and Iranian-backed government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Turkey invaded Syria not to end the humanitarian disaster it had helped create there but to prevent the emergence of a US-backed Kurdish nationalist enclave.

Contrary to Erdo?an’s claims, deportation would not be “voluntarily” chosen but imposed on refugees, due to the far-right anti-refugee campaign and dirty deals with the European Union. The vast majority of refugees understandably do not want to return to Syria, where the war still continues. Refugees who want to cross into Europe are blocked at the borders with Greece and Bulgaria and sent back to Turkey.

They do not even have a legal status of “refugees” in Turkey. They live in misery, deprived of basic rights, subjected to uncontrolled exploitation and targeted by

the far right. The *World Socialist Web Site* rejects this campaign and emphasizes that it is essential for the international working class to defend the democratic rights of refugees in struggle against the bourgeoisie. In the case of Turkey, this means full citizenship rights for refugees and making education available for Arab as well as Kurdish people in their mother tongues.

Turkey hosts the highest number of refugees in the world, as a result of over 30 years of US-led imperialist wars across the region since the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union. According to a report by the Association for Refugees in Turkey, there are 3.75 million Syrians living in Turkey as of March 24. According to Erdo?an’s statement last December, there are over 5 million refugees in Turkey in total.

The far-right campaign against refugees in Turkey has escalated in recent weeks, with politicians and pundits promoting anti-refugee hashtags on Twitter. Chauvinist comments are increasingly common in the bourgeois and the pseudo-left press.

The entire political and media establishment scapegoats refugees and immigrants in Turkey, and internationally, because the bourgeoisie and the affluent middle class have no progressive response to the growing economic and social crisis. The ruling class strengthens fascistic movements by taking up the old, reactionary weapon of chauvinism to divide the working class and deflect growing social opposition.

The vast majority of Turkey’s population lives with spiraling high inflation, unemployment and deepening poverty, as the pandemic continues and the danger of world war grows. And the ruling class enriches itself at the expense of the health, lives and wages of the workers.

Throughout the pandemic and now the war in Ukraine in which NATO sanctions against Russia

disrupted global supply chains, the already unbearable food prices and poverty in Turkey rose even faster. Protests and strikes that broke out in January and February were only the initial expressions of growing social unrest.

Now, establishment parties spread the lie that the cause of all the problems stemming from the capitalist system and bourgeois rule is the refugees. Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the leader of the Kemalist Republican People's Party (CHP), backed by the pseudo-left, criticized Erdoğan's plan to deport 1 million refugees to Syria from the right. Adopting far-right rhetoric, he said: "Come off it! There are still flows of fugitives coming from the border. We will send the rest in two years, and we are all fed up with your fake projects."

Right-wing parties like the fascistic Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), the main ally of Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP), as well as the CHP's partners—the Good Party, DEVA, Future Party and Felicity Party—also call to expel refugees from Turkey.

This bipartisan attack on defenseless refugees, who form an integral part of the working class, is clear proof that the CHP and its pseudo-left allies are no less reactionary and hostile to the working class than the Erdoğan government.

However, the most prominent in the anti-refugee campaign recently has been the Victory Party (*Zafer Partisi*). Founded by Ümit Özdağ, who left the far-right Good Party, this middle class party brands refugees as Turkey's main problem and hysterically campaigns for their deportation. It claims that there would be a civil war in Turkey if refugees stay in the country, and it has started to gather far-right circles around it with its furious campaign.

On April 19, Özdağ announced a "Fortress Anatolia" project to send refugees back to their countries. This is a reference to the European Union's Fortress Europe policy, which aims to prevent refugees from the Middle East and Africa from entering Europe. This policy has already caused thousands of refugees to drown in the Mediterranean Sea and Turkey and Greece to become refugee prisons.

Moreover, a short film named *Silent Invasion*, broadcast on journalist Hande Karacasu's YouTube channel on May 3 and which Özdağ personally financed, further escalated the anti-refugee campaign.

Karacasu's fascistic film, full of distortions and lies, quickly moved to the top of the press and social media. Over 3 million saw it in three days on YouTube.

According to the script of the film which seeks to exploit the racial fears of the affluent middle class, Arabs become the majority in Turkey in the year 2043. The Turkish minority is exposed to oppression, discrimination and violence. Most Turkish youth are unemployed, and a small number of them consider themselves lucky as they have jobs. The state administration has passed into Arab hands, with Arabic made an official language. Turkish language and culture are being destroyed.

Shortly after the film was released, the Turkish National Police issued a press release, fearing that the situation would explode out of control. The press release announced that Hande Karacasu and the user of the "Militer Doktrin" Twitter account were detained and legal proceedings initiated against them for manipulation. Karacasu was released the next day.

Such far-right provocations have previously led to killings of refugees and pogrom attempts by far-right elements. Three Syrian refugees were burned to death in Izmir last November, and a far-right mob raided a Syrian neighborhood in Ankara in August.

The events in Doğanlık, a district in the southern city of Adana, on May 1 are another serious warning. After a quarrel between Syrian refugees and Turkish citizens broke out, attacks were reportedly carried out on the homes of Syrians, and four people were injured.

The way forward against the growing far-right and anti-refugee campaign is through the struggle for the international socialist unity of the working class, rejecting all forms of chauvinism and nationalism. This means building the Socialist Equality Party as the Turkish section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), the only political tendency worldwide to uncompromisingly oppose the anti-refugee campaign.



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