

Nine refugees, mostly children, die in fire in Turkey: A social crime

Hasan Y?ld?r?m
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The fire that killed nine people, eight of them children, in Bursa, Turkey last week was a product of the horrible conditions in which refugees fleeing the devastation of imperialist wars are being condemned.

Amina Eltaha Elmuse, Hussein Aljasem and their children, who fled the NATO-backed regime change war in Aleppo, Syria, and sought refuge in Turkey, were living under “temporary protection” in Bursa. On the night of November 9, a fire broke out in the building where they were residing, killing the mother, Amina Eltaha Elmuse, as well as the couple’s children, one-year-old Yasir, three-year-old Muhammad, four-year-old Ahmed, nine-year-old Merem and 10-year-old Ali Aljasem. The couple’s nephews, 10-year-old Ahmed and 11-year-old Ali El Cesim, also died in the fire.

According to fire brigade reports, smoke from the stove backfired due to a blocked chimney and filled the room where nine people were sleeping. They were poisoned by carbon monoxide gas. A fire broke out when sparks falling from the stove chimney ignited the furniture. As the flames engulfed the room in a short time, nine people, unconscious due to poisoning, could not escape and burned to death.

According to a report by the FISA Center for Children’s Rights, “In the first 10 months of 2022, at least 17 children lost their lives in fires in their homes. ... We see that fires or poisonings mostly occur in neighborhoods where people from the lowest income groups, migrants or Roma, live; where there are violations in access to services. The reasons are clear: poverty, inequality and lack of control.”

In Turkey, refugees and migrants work under harsh conditions without legal rights for wages below the already very low minimum wage. They constitute the most deprived and vulnerable section of the working

class and are forced to live in crowded homes and in places that do not meet basic needs.

Moreover, far-right political forces such as the Victory Party seek to promote national chauvinism and divide workers by repeating the lie that refugees receive cash assistance from the Turkish state and live in comfort. In reality, Syrians in Turkey (officially around 3.7 million people) are not even recognized as legal asylum seekers. Only those who meet certain conditions receive a very low cash allowance from the European Union, in accordance with a dirty deal between Brussels and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s government.

In Turkey, where the official annual inflation rate has reached 85 percent, 90 percent of the population is estimated to be living below the poverty line. This is accompanied by massive social unrest and growing militancy among the working class. All factions of the ruling class are united in deflecting this growing social opposition in one way or another. From Afghanistan to Iraq and Syria, millions of people were forced to flee their homes as a result of US-led imperialist aggression and regime change wars, in which the Turkish ruling elite has been complicit. Now the refugees are being made scapegoats for the social catastrophe of capitalism.

DISK union confederation’s executive Seyit Aslan said that two of the children who lost their lives were textile workers. In his statement, Aslan said, “Migrants, who are supposedly under protection, are exploited in the heaviest way and lose their lives at workplaces. So, who is responsible for these deaths? Unquestionably, those who started the ongoing war in Syria, the imperialists and their collaborators are responsible for the continuation of this war and those who caused the region to turn into a bloodbath.”

Orhan Sar?bal, Bursa MP of the main bourgeois opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), also said, "Poverty is a fundamental problem in Turkey. But what Syrians are going through is completely different. It should also be linked to the war and migration in Syria." He added, "These people are made to work in Turkey as cheap labor without any security. They have no security of life. While those with money live in villas, these poor people live in despair in such places. In the end, the dead are left with the dead. Poverty kills."

These statements are hypocritical. In fact, the CHP attacks the refugee policy of President Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) government from the right and pursues a chauvinist anti-Syrian policy. The CHP promises to repatriate refugees if it comes to power in next year's elections.

As for DISK, it is a pro-CHP union confederation, and like all other corporatist unions, far from trying to unite the working class, it undermines workers' actions and imposes sellout contracts. To date, DISK has made no more than a few token statements against the relentless exploitation of refugees and child labor.

The Erdogan government is tasked with preventing refugees from crossing into Europe, in line with its dirty deal with the EU. Ankara's escalating of tensions with Athens has only intensified the criminal policy of push-backs of refugees, who are desperately trying to cross the Aegean Sea to Greece.

The Fortress Europe policy has turned the Mediterranean into a refugee graveyard. As the *World Socialist Web Site* has recently reported, "More than 3,000 migrants died, or have gone missing, presumed dead, while trying to reach Europe by sea in 2021." Moreover, "Of the year so far, 'In 2022, 1,386 boats have been stopped on their way towards Greece,' and a staggering '44,041 people have been arrested.'"

Erdogan's government announced a policy of sending back refugees and started building settlements in the Syrian province of Idlib under control of the Turkish army and its Islamist proxies. The policy of sending back refugees is not only advocated by major bourgeois parties like the CHP and AKP or the far-right middle class Victory Party. The pseudo-left forces lining up behind the CHP are also openly or covertly supporting this policy.

For example, the Workers' Party of Turkey (TIP)

advocates "a foreign policy and diplomacy understanding that will make it possible for asylum seekers in our country to voluntarily return to their country and to make living in Turkey no longer the only option." The TIP, which is a part of the Kurdish nationalist People's Democratic Party-led "Labor and Freedom Alliance," has declared that it will support the candidate of the right-wing Nation Alliance led by the CHP against Erdogan in the presidential elections.

Under these conditions, asylum seekers are subjected to physical attacks by right-wing extremists. The latest of these attacks took place in the Erzin district of Hatay. On November 5, 14-year-old Fidan Tunç went missing and five days later her body was found hanging from a tree. One person was detained as part of the investigation. As this person was allegedly a Syrian, a mob incited by far-right elements in the district organized attacks on houses where Syrians live, forcing many refugees to flee their homes.

This attack on refugees was not the first. In August 2021, a far-right mob in Ankara's Alt?ndag district took to the streets shouting anti-Syrian slogans and raided a neighborhood where they lived. In November of the same year, three Syrian refugees were burned to death in Izmir. On May 1 this year, in Adana's Dogankent neighborhood, after a quarrel between refugees and Turkish citizens, the homes of Syrians were attacked.

Following Sunday's terrorist attack in Istanbul in which six people were killed, an anti-refugee campaign was launched by far-right forces on social media after it was announced that the alleged perpetrator was Syrian.

The situation facing the refugees and the working class as a whole underlines the fact that the struggle to defend social and democratic rights cannot be separated from the fight against imperialist war and capitalism. The only way forward is a struggle for the internationalist socialist unity of the working class that rejects all forms of chauvinism and nationalism.



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