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Turkish government prepares to deport Syrian refugees living in Istanbul

The Istanbul Governor's Office announced on July 22 that Syrian refugees who are not registered in Istanbul have until August 20 to return to the cities in Turkey where they are registered or face deportation. Syrians who do not officially have refugee status, afraid of being caught and deported, will be forced into hiding or be trapped in their homes.

According to the statement, "Those determined not to have gone back will be transferred to the provinces of their registration in line with the instruction of our Interior Ministry."

The office declared that in Istanbul "there are a total of 1,069,860 registered foreigners, 522,381 whom are foreign nationals with a residence permit and 547,479 Syrian guests."

The Turkish government's assault comes after multiple unconfirmed reports of raids and forced transfers of undocumented refugees, especially Syrians, in Istanbul. It also comes amid growing government attacks against immigrants internationally and the **police crackdown** on protests by undocumented workers in Paris.

According to a report in the *Independent's* Turkish edition last Friday, although the Immigration Authority claimed that Syrians are to be sent where they were registered, there have also been some deportations to Syria after refugees were forced to sign a "Voluntary Return" document.

Refugees who have signed this "Voluntary Return" document first find themselves in the Migration Administration's guesthouse and then outside the border. The frequency of police checkpoints at the entrances and exits of designated districts in Istanbul will be increased to capture and deport "undocumented" refugees. According to the report,

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officials claim that deported Syrians have been sent to Afrin, which is occupied by the Turkish army and the Free Syrian Army (FSA); however, some were reportedly transferred to Idlib, a dangerous city controlled by Islamist forces backed by the Turkish government.

These operations have been launched directly under the control of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) government. Turkish Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu made a statement on Saturday, declaring that Europe has deserted Turkey in its efforts to aid in the blocking of refugees from reaching the EU.

Claiming that his government is "making a great contribution to humanity" with its refugee policy, Soylu boasted: "So far, 337,729 Syrians have returned, and this flow continues." He threatened the European governments to open the borders and let refugees travel to Europe if they do not give financial resources to Turkey. Currently, the EU is paying off Erdoğan's AKP government in a dirty deal to keep asylum seekers from reaching Europe which Soylu claimed gives Erdoğan enormous leverage: "No government in Europe will be able to withstand this wave for more than six months."

In fact, the Erdoğan government has increasingly intensified its anti-refugee policy in the recent period, with the full support of the bourgeois opposition led by the Republican People's Party (CHP). The entire capitalist political establishment is moving against them and provoking chauvinist attacks.

During the local election campaign, CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu repeatedly declared that "Syrians should return," while AKP's Istanbul mayoral candidate Binali Yıldırım threatened "to grab them by the ear and throw them out."

In some cities where the CHP controls the municipal administration, local governments decided that refugees cannot enter the beach and that their settlements should be removed from near the shore. The decisions were adopted by municipal council members from the CHP and its far-right ally, the Good Party.

The purpose of this reactionary anti-Syrian rhetoric is to divide the working class along national lines and to block a common struggle of workers across the Middle East. To this end, the CHP, the Good Party and their media supporters have long called for holding referendums on sending Syrians back home or blamed them for high levels of unemployment, poverty and social inequality caused by capitalism.

Because of this completely reactionary campaign both in the media and on social media, at the end of June, there was an attempted lynching based on an unfounded allegation against Syrians in Istanbul. After a claim about an incident of abuse, which proved to be unfounded, a mob gathered and launched violent attacks on places where Syrians live or work.

Significantly, after the latest raids and arrests against Syrians, the CHP's Istanbul head Canan Kaftancıoğlu, who is a close aide of the newly elected mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu (CHP), was interviewed on Halk TV and, in the name of her party, openly backed the government's policy against refugees.

This underscores the fraud of the "democratic" pretensions of the CHP, promoted by the mainstream media in the imperialist countries and Turkey's petty bourgeois "left" parties as an alternative to the authoritarian AKP government.

In fact, both of Turkey's major bourgeois parties are deeply implicated in the imperialist war crimes committed against the Syrian population. Millions of Syrian refugees who had to live under inhuman conditions in Turkey because of the CIA-fueled war for regime change in Syria, now face great dangers like those immigrants in the United States who are being attacked by the Trump administration.

The CHP's reactionary role both in the war in Syria and in state attacks on refugees underscores the bankruptcy of the Turkish pseudo-left which enthusiastically supported the CHP and İmamoğlu.

Alper Tas, the leader of the petty-bourgeois Freedom and Solidarity Party (ÖDP), agreed to run for office in the Beyoğlu district of Istanbul with the support of the CHP and the far-right Good Party on March 31. When he campaigned in Beyoğlu with the CHP and Good Party, a Good Party candidate in Fatih district of Istanbul openly campaigned with a banner reading, "I will not deliver Fatih to the Syrians."

The arrests and deportations of Syrians are directly connected both to the scapegoating of refugees for the social crisis produced by capitalism, and the Turkish government's war aims in Syria. Ankara has long insisted that it must extend the "safe zone" it currently controls in northwest Syria east of the Euphrates to smash the Kurdish-led proto-state there and chase the main US-linked, PKK-allied Kurdish militias from the region. The Turkish government plans to use these "safe zones" to both deport Syrians and increase its influence in the region.

As the US special envoy for Syria James Jeffrey visited Turkey on Monday for discussions on the “safe zone,” Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşođlu declared on same day: “If the safe zone is not established and threats towards our country continue, we will launch the operation in the east of the Euphrates.”

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