

Greek police detain 143 migrants in Athens raid

By George Gallanis
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With helicopters hovering above, hundreds of police in full riot gear raided four buildings in Athen's Exarcheia neighborhood on August 26. After blocking all entryways, the police detained 143 migrants and refugees, 35 of whom were children and babies. Many lived in a building known as Spirou Trikoupi 17.

The migrants hailed from Iraq, Afghanistan, Turkey and Eritrea. They were immediately taken to the Petrou Ralli police station in Athens and then moved to a hotel. They are currently being moved to one of Greece's infamous refugee detention centers.

Additionally, three other people were arrested—two Greek nationals and one French national.

The 143 detained lost all of their belongings. The police threw everything inside the buildings into the trash.

The Spirou Trikoupi 17 Facebook page published a statement by one of the evicted refugees. It read:

This morning at 8 am they woke us up and they took us to Sakaramagas camp. We had to pick up our bags once again, for the third time since we got evicted. When we arrived at the camp they informed us that we had to wait for another bus to move us to several different camps around Greece. Most of us had to move to places around Thessaloniki, over 400 km from here. We don't want to do that. They are playing with us.

They have evicted us from our house and they have destroyed it, but they will not also take away the life we have managed to create here in Athens. Our children are going to the school in Exarcheia and we refuse to make them leave it and have to adapt to a new place once again. We want to stay here. We answered them that we will not go

anywhere against our will. We keep strong.

Exarcheia has served as a safe haven for refugees and migrants, with many describing it as a far better alternative to the detention centers strewn across Greece, especially the notoriously overcrowded centers on the islands of Chios, Samos, Lesbos, Kos and Leros. While in Exarcheia, many received donations in the form of food, medicine, clothing and other items from community members.

Prior to the raids, a refugee from Afghanistan told the *Guardian*, "I am so happy here, I feel safe. Here we work together and have a good life."

Another refugee from Gaza said, "I visited the camps as a volunteer. You're not a refugee there, you feel like you are in prison—and they're full. [Exarcheia] is important for me because I feel more like home, I feel a little more human. We have space to sleep, neighbors and a neighborhood around us."

Greece's current refugee population stands at around 70,000. Since the start of August, some 6,000 additional refugees have been detained on the five islands with detention centers. According to the latest figures, the islands hold more than 24,000 people, with many detained in camps designed to hold a third of their current total.

The neighborhood of Exarcheia has a long history of radicalism and left-wing politics. On November 17, 1973, at least 23 students were murdered by the US-backed dictatorship of Georgios Papadopoulos after multiple days of protests at Athens Polytechnic University, which is located in Exarcheia.

On December 6, 2008, Greek police killed 15-year-old Alexis Grigoropoulos just blocks from the university, sparking one of the largest protests in

Greece since the fall of the Papadopoulos dictatorship in 1974.

The raids on Exarcheia serve multiple interests of Greece's ruling class. The area has the potential for providing new streams of revenue in the form of undeveloped real estate and business opportunities. Plans are in place to construct a new metro station in the neighborhood and develop the entire area for restaurants, stores, apartment complexes and the like.

Moreover, the attack on Exarcheia comes at a time of growing fear within Greece's ruling class of a social explosion that could take on revolutionary dimensions. Exarcheia's history as a center of anti-police protest and left-wing activism is of deep concern to Greece's ruling elites. Whatever the limitations of the politics in Exarcheia, heavily influenced by anarchist groupings, for the ruling class, the housing and care of refugees has gone too far. The raids and plans to gentrify the area are aimed at suppressing social opposition to the ruling class's brutal austerity measures.

The raids flow directly from the xenophobic and chauvinist attacks on migrants carried out by the preceding Syriza government, which oversaw the eviction of hundreds of refugees in Athens.

The raids were preceded by the New Democracy government's revocation of asylum seekers' right to access health and social security services, its buildup of border security, and its deployment of a zeppelin to hound refugees entering Greece via the sea. Last week, Greek riot police attacked child asylum seekers and refugees at the overcrowded Moria camp in Mytilini, the capital of the island of Lesbos, where refugees are forced to live under inhumane conditions.

These attacks are part of an international process. Greece's anti-refugee policies are part of a coordinated drive by all of Europe's governments as well as the Trump administration in the US. The attacks on migrants go hand in hand with the whipping up of nationalism, chauvinism and fascism—all symptoms of a diseased system, capitalism. They are a warning to the Greek and international working class of what is being prepared against all workers.

Speaking for Greece's ruling class, Stavros Balaskas, vice president of Greece's Police Union, justified the police crackdown in Athens on a daytime television show, saying it was like a finger turning on a "silent vacuum cleaner that will sweep up garbage."

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