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Meet the new boss: Greek police baton & tear gas migrant demonstration

Andrew Flood

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Saturday police in Greece batoned and tear gassed protesters outside one of the migrant detention camps now being run by Syriza. Militant protests both inside and outside the camp resumed last weekend after the suicide of a Pakistani migrant, Nadim Mohammed who had been held for 18 months, released and then returned to the Amygdaleza camp. The news of the suicide broke on February 14th along with the news that another migrant had killed themselves in Thessaloniki police station.

This led to protests both in Thessalonki (pictured) and what police claimed was a mass escape attempt from Amygdaleza which now houses around 1300 migrants. In suppressing those protests two of the camp buildings were destroyed by fire. Because of the despair created by the conditions there have been multiple suicide attempts in Amygdaleza. In one weekend in April 2013, long before Syriza came to power there were three attempts and a hunger strike involving 2000 migrants detained

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in several centres. There are currently 7000 migrants in detention centres and an unknown additional number detained in police stations.

At yesterday's protest at Amygdaleza police attacked the crowd with shields, batons and then pepper spray. They also targeted a photo journalist who photographed their attack, knocking him to the ground. Yes Syriza have ordered the riot police to stay away from the pro-government demonstrations outside parliament but they are still being deployed at the detention camps and are using their old methods.

Before these events but after the suicide the Minister of Public Order Yannis Panousis was videoed visiting the camp as migrants chanted 'Freedom, Freedom' and other spoke to the cameras about the terrible conditions within. Syriza have responded to the latest revolt by promising reforms to include better treatment for those held over 18 months, vulnerable groups and those who have not had a legal decision made with regard to their future within 6 months. The video is harrowing and can be viewed at below

This would bring the conditions migrants are warehoused under in Greece closer to conditions elsewhere in Europe. Waiting ahead of the elections the migrant solidarity site Clandestina noted that "If the institutional Left form the next Greek government, they might indeed shut down the concentration camps, but not necessarily as part of a politics of respect of human dignity and basic rights, but in order to harmonize Greek policy with E.U. legislation, by putting the EU money to good use, opening more proper detention facilities, and satisfying the demands of the Greek police and their more conservative voters along the way. Indeed, a part of the institutional Left in Greece is speaking in favor of the same system that radical movements throughout Europe are fighting against." For more background see the full statement in the comments.

Meanwhile migrants continue to be locked into these centers and those who protest the conditions inside or outside the camps risk police batons and tear gas. Yes no one could expect that Syriza would magically create new reception centers instantly, the question is why are the detention centers still being run as prisons, with guards on locked doors preventing the unwilling inmates from leaving? Because if its geographic location Greece has been doing the dirty work of the rest of the EU for years in detaining migrants and thus preventing them moving on, why is it still doing so under the new left government?