Fighting racism in Lebanon: The long battle

Nidal Ayoub

It would be mistaken to believe that racism in Lebanon toward Syrians is something new, or that racism is directed solely against them. Foreign workers have also experienced a rising level of hatred and racism, and the fear of the “Syrian threat,” which racists use as a justification, comes years after the fear of a similar, “Palestinian threat.”

However, today we are seeing a frightening rise in the number of assaults on Syrian workers, in all parts of Lebanon. It’s similar to what happened to them beginning in 2005, when Amnesty International issued a report that detailed the murder of 20 Syrian workers, and 31 cases in which the places they lived were subjected to arson attacks. Moreover, around 700 Syrians went missing between 2005 and 2010, according to the Lebanese newspaper al-Akhbar. Obviously, the previous and current attacks on Syrians are not isolated, “individual acts,” as some claim. They are part of a methodological campaign of racist incitement against Syrians: everything from statements by politicians and the rhetoric of media outlets and political parties of all stripes to the government’s arbitrary measures and decisions by municipalities. Amid these miserable conditions for Syrians, we see very few positions taken against this type of racism and exploitation to which Syrians are subjected. Thus, it’s not an easy path, especially since the labor unions that claim they want change have exempted Syrians from their agenda. They haven’t said a single word in their defense, as if they aren’t workers. The same goes for the traditional leftist parties, who haven’t issued a single statement about the refugee issue – not even a statement condemning the racism or exploitation to which Syrians are subjected. Thus, we will arrive at a solution only by re-building a mass-based workers movement, comprising all working classes and all nationalities, with no discrimination.

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Right now, we need to build and organize to confront the current and subsequent challenges. The movement against racism and fascism is still in its infancy, and might not be tangible. But building a strongly-anchored movement requires a lot of time and effort. For this to happen, we cannot remain silent and leave the field to people who spread racism at night, and even during the day.

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But if we move away from the media and social media, the association Support Lebanon has noted that some areas of Greater Beirut, such as Furn al-Shubhak, Ain al-Rummaneh, Hadath, Saraye and Mar Mikhail-Nahr, have seen posters and flyers speaking out against the racist treatment of Syrian refugees and workers. They were signed by the “Committee against Sectarianism and Racism.” The association published on its website a written statement, with some photographs. However, until now there has been no information available about who is behind this committee or other groups like it, or about its work plans and future actions.