

Europe's rulers whip up anti-immigrant chauvinism

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Membership of the European Union is supposed to confer on a country's citizens the right to free movement and freedom from discrimination on the grounds of nationality.

The populations of Bulgaria and Romania have been targeted by the major European powers for the removal of these rights.

The EU has agreed to postpone a decision on Bulgarian and Romanian membership of the visa-free Schengen zone. Both countries are members of the EU and, according to the European Commission, have fulfilled their obligations under the treaty. After two years of postponement, their citizens were finally to be eligible to work within the EU without restrictions from 2014. But EU justice and home affairs ministers meeting last week delayed agreement, after Germany's Hans-Peter Friedrich said his country would veto their membership of the Schengen zone.

Friedrich asked contemptuously, "Does free movement in Europe mean that we can expect one day that people anywhere in Europe, who believe that they can live on welfare in Germany better than in their own countries, will come to Germany?"

"Those who only come to receive social welfare, and thus abuse their freedom of movement--they must be effectively prevented from doing so," he insisted.

Germany is by no means alone. Britain, France, The Netherlands and Austria have made similar statements. Their stance exposes the claims as to the progressive, "harmonising" mission of the EU that was made most stridently at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union and its satellite states.

During the 1990s the European bourgeoisie rushed to entice the eastern European countries into the EU, holding out the promise of economic prosperity and political stability in an equitable union of nations.

Over the next period, the economies of these countries were looted as the EU demanded sweeping privatisations and the destruction of extensive social welfare provisions. This was justified on the grounds that "structural adjustment" was necessary in order to be fully integrated into the European club.

Instead, even after many of the eastern European countries were accepted into the EU (Bulgaria and Romania joined in 2007) there has been no end to the pain. The result is rising unemployment, joblessness and economic insecurity. Bulgaria and Romania are the two poorest countries in the EU, with half of their populations at risk of poverty.

The EU admits that the ruling elites in Bulgaria and Romania have done everything demanded of them. But it sadistically argues that the very "success" of its scorched earth prescriptions means their populations must not be allowed their rights as EU citizens because the impoverishment inflicted upon them makes them unwelcome!

Ivan Krastev, chairman of the Centre for Liberal Strategies think-tank in Bulgaria, told the *Financial Times*, "The idea was transition was painful, it was suffering. But now [with EU membership] we were supposed to get to a totally different life. We were going to live if not like Germans, at least like Greeks. It never happened."

His statement sums up the sea change that has taken place in European class relations. For more than a decade, the Eastern European countries strove to live "like Greeks". But rather than joining a Europe of prosperity, they joined a Europe of austerity.

Greece has been the laboratory in which the European bourgeoisie has utilised the global capitalist crisis to roll out the shock therapy it pioneered in Eastern Europe across the continent. Subject to five years of

savage austerity, unemployment in Greece is more than 25 percent, and almost 50 percent among the youth; food banks are a way of life for tens of thousands, and health care and educational provision is grinding to a halt.

Instead of Bulgaria and Romania “levelling up”, conditions across the continent are being levelled down to a benchmark no longer even set in eastern Europe but in China.

The attitude of the major European powers towards Bulgaria and Romania is not only a matter of great-power arrogance. Class retribution plays its role. Both countries have seen mass movements against EU-dictated austerity that have brought down governments associated with these policies—in April last year in Romania and only last month in Bulgaria.

As punishment, the working population of these countries are now slandered as welfare scroungers, and held virtually captive, while finance capital is free to plunder Europe without let or hindrance.

Meanwhile, vicious propagandising against “benefit tourism” is used to divert from the actual source of rising unemployment and falling wages that lies in governmental policies dictated by the real parasites in society—the financial oligarchy.

While slashing wages and conditions, the New Democracy-led government in Greece—in coalition with the social-democratic PASOK and Democratic Left—authorises mass round-ups of immigrants and other racist measures as it appropriates the policies of the fascist Golden Dawn.

The same tendency is underway throughout Western Europe, with social democratic parties increasingly taking the lead.

In Germany, the Social Democrat Mayor of Duisburg, Soren Link, has unleashed a filthy, racist tirade against eastern European migrants, complaining that their presence drains resources from “native” citizens.

In France, the Socialist Party government of Francois Hollande continues the policies of Gaullist President Nicolas Sarkozy, carrying out raids on immigrant camps and mass deportations, as it competes with the National Front.

In Britain, the Labour Party is championing “maximum controls” on eastern European migration, under the demand—again appropriated from the fascist British National Party—of “British jobs for British

workers.”

The target of such measures is the social rights of the entire working class. The demands to bar immigrants from welfare entitlements—including health and housing—is used to justify the claim that social provision is no longer affordable and must be eliminated.

Political responsibility for this reactionary offensive lies with the pseudo-left groups, such as SYRIZA in Greece, who, while claiming to oppose austerity and racism, defend the profit system that is the source of both and the primary mechanism through which the assault of the ruling elite is being coordinated and imposed—the EU.

Workers and youth must actively oppose the campaign of anti-immigrant chauvinism. Against the efforts of big business to divide and rule, they must place the defence of migrant workers at the centre of a Europe-wide revolt against the austerity measures of the EU and its constituent governments, in the fight for government by the working class and the socialist unification of the continent.



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