Apartheid for asylum seekers comes to Europe

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The right-wing Swiss People's Party government has introduced racist and inhumane laws akin to those that existed in South Africa under apartheid.

In several towns, such as the Bremgarten near Zurich, immigrants have been denied access to public areas, including sports premises and swimming pools, and subjected to a curfew. The government's immigration department, the BFM, has barred immigrants from a total of 32 "sensitive zones" in Bremgarten, including churches, libraries and old people's homes.

The legislation has been passed on the pretext of placating the anger of local residents. The mayor of the town declared it was decided "on security grounds not to allow access to these areas, to prevent conflict and guard against possible drug use."

Asylum seekers in Switzerland are being forced to live under concentration camp conditions in run-down military barracks and industrial estates. It is not uncommon for asylum seekers to share their bedrooms and kitchen facilities with dozens of other people facing the same plight, with no means to exercise or have any interaction with local residents. Some towns are using planning and land use regulations to block asylum seekers from taking refuge.

DNA tests on Eritrean asylum seekers are being systematically carried out by some Swiss cantons to screen those who cite as a reason for asylum the presence of family members in Switzerland. Recent laws have eliminated military desertion as a valid reason for asylum. This is specifically designed to prevent Eritreans from entering, as the Eritrean regime imposes unlimited, low-paid military service on all able-bodied men and women. Switzerland has passed the law despite the fact that the United Nations condemns the practise of indefinite military service as a human rights violation.

Switzerland's measures are not unique. The denial of basic human rights to asylum seekers and immigrants is being carried out by governments of every political colouration throughout Europe. In Greece, for example, asylum seekers and immigrants are being rounded up in their thousands and thrown into camps, where they languish under abominable conditions (see http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2013/08/13/gree-a13.html).

These policies are being justified by the ruling elite on the grounds that the numbers seeking asylum are too high to cope with. The reality is that the numbers claiming asylum are relatively small, with just 48,000 people seeking asylum in Switzerland this year—a number any compassionate society could easily assimilate. According to official data, between early 2010 and early 2011, just 100,000 people were deemed to have entered the European Union (EU) illegally. This equates to just 0.02 percent of the EU's population of 500 million.

Another tactic for denying asylum seekers their rights is to accuse them of being economic migrants who are looking to take the jobs and livelihoods of settled workers. But the overwhelming majority of applications for asylum come from countries and regions that have been devastated as a result of imperialist wars and interventions. Much of Switzerland's immigration since the 1990s has been from the Balkans, a region ravaged by imperialist brigandage.

Behind every asylum seeker is a story of human tragedy. Some 90 percent of asylum seekers applying to live in Germany are from Chechnya and the North Caucasus. Many asylum seekers are seeking to enter Europe from countries in North Africa and the Middle East—forced to leave as a result of wars and imperialist

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interventions in Libya and elsewhere. More than 2 million people have been made refugees as a result of the escalation of Washington's proxy war in Syria alone.

Under these conditions, no intelligent debate regarding the plight of refugees is allowed, with the media flooding public discourse with a constant stream of anti-immigrant rhetoric. The racism promoted by the major parties and the media has fuelled the growth of anti-immigrant parties of the far right throughout the continent. It has enabled fascistic and xenophobic parties such as Greece's Golden Dawn and the Swiss People's Party to blame immigrants and asylum seekers for escalating poverty, joblessness and the destruction of social services.

The official parties of every colouration espouse a filthy concoction of economic nationalism and social chauvinism. This includes the social democratic parties, along with their allies in the trade unions. A prime example is the British Labour Party, which champions a policy of "British jobs for British workers." The Labour Party has unveiled a raft of nationalist employment policies ahead of a general election to accompany its claims to be as tough on immigration as its Conservative rivals.

Asylum seekers are not to blame, either for their own fate or for other workers being denied decent employment, health care, education and social benefits. It is the ruling class that is wholly responsible for the mass unemployment and poverty afflicting workers throughout Europe and internationally, and the political parties and trade unions that impose such misery on their behalf.

Since 2008, the ruling elite has utilised the economic crisis of its own making to launch an offensive against workers and youth aimed at smashing all past social gains and reducing millions to subsistence levels. Always, immigrants and asylum seekers are scapegoated as being responsible for the impact of such criminal policies.

Writing in 1933 against the growing fascist menace, Leon Trotsky said the ideology of Hitler's Nazi movement "is composed of all the putrid vapours of decomposing bourgeois society."

Today, mankind is once again being engulfed by the same putrid vapours as capitalism's economic crisis intensifies. Under such conditions, the inoculation of working people against the poisons of nationalism, racism and xenophobia is central to any successful fight against austerity. The lie that asylum seekers and immigrants are the cause of society's ills must be rejected and the right to asylum defended as part of the struggle to build a mass internationalist movement against capitalism and for socialism.

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