

The tragedy of Mediterranean migrants and the crimes of imperialism

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This speech was delivered by Julie Hyland, assistant national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party (UK), to the May 3 International May Day Online Rally, organized by the International Committee of the Fourth International.

It is two weeks since the world learned with horror of the deaths of more than 800 migrants, drowned in the Mediterranean.

They had been crammed into a fishing vessel, trying to make their way from Libya to Europe, when it capsized. There were just 28 survivors. Hundreds were locked in the hold, including women and children.

One can't even begin to imagine their terror as their lungs filled with water.

But they are just a small number of the largely nameless and faceless migrants for whom the Mediterranean—the stuff of tourist brochures—has become a giant tomb. Some 27,000 people have drowned attempting the same journey since 2000. Each year the numbers meeting this grisly fate rise: more than 1,700 people in the last four months.

Among broad masses, news of this tragedy was met with revulsion and sympathy. Many recognised there was nothing accidental about their deaths. They are just a fraction of the millions of victims of the criminal war policies of the US and the European powers in the Middle East and North Africa, which have set in motion the largest mass migration since the Second World War.

The majority of those attempting the journey are from Syria, while Libya is the main transit point. This is the reality of the so-called “humanitarian interventions” in these countries that were supported by the pseudo-left.

Such claims are made all the more obscene by the European Union's decision last year to abandon its search and rescue operation in the Mediterranean

because it had created a “pull factor”, encouraging people to make the dangerous crossing in the belief they would be rescued if they got into trouble.

And so the watchword of Fortress Europe became, “Let them drown.”

This vicious immigration policy is the flip side of the ruling elite's hostility to the working class and youth of Europe. The sadism exhibited towards those fleeing war, poverty and repression mirrors the attitude taken by the European Union and International Monetary Fund towards the workers and youth of Greece being subjected to unending austerity.

The situation in Europe increasingly resembles that at the first part of the 20th century. The Manifesto of the Fourth International on Imperialist War, written in 1940, explained, “The world of decaying capitalism is overcrowded. The question of admitting a hundred extra refugees becomes a major problem for such a world power as the United States.”

Capitalism in decay was “striving to squeeze the Jewish people from all its pores,” it continued. “Seventeen million individuals out of the two billion populating the globe, that is, less than 1 percent, can no longer find a place on our planet! Amid the vast expanses of land and the marvels of technology, which has also conquered the skies for man as well as the earth, the bourgeoisie has managed to convert our planet into a foul prison.”

Today, in the age of exploratory missions to Mars and of the Internet, where trillions of dollars are transferred around the globe at the stroke of a key, capitalism is again attempting to squeeze from its pores the victims of the social nightmare it has created.

At the same time their suffering is used as the pretext for the ruling elite to advance its predatory interests. A massive police/military operation is being set up,

involving warships, helicopters, drones and Special Forces as the European bourgeoisie seeks to reassert control of its former colonies.

Everywhere this drive is legitimised by racist and nationalist filth. The Nuremberg trials highlighted the role of the propaganda sheet *Der Stürmer* in peddling the Nazis' anti-Semitic and racist caricatures and urging the physical destruction of Jews as vermin.

Today *Charlie Hebdo*'s anti-Islamic provocations are championed as “freedom of expression”, while Rupert Murdoch's *Sun* newspaper columnist Katie Hopkins described the Mediterranean migrants as a “plague of feral humans,” “cockroaches,” demanding that gunships “drive them back to their shores.”

The language of the extreme right is again that of official discourse, as the ruling elites try to conceal the real source of the social crisis and justify new wars of aggression.

To this end the National Front (FN) in France, Pegida in Germany and the UK Independence Party are given massive media coverage and cloaked in respectability.

That such organisations can claim any popular base is only because they are able to capitalise on the betrayals of the old and discredited so-called workers' organisations and their support for the existing order.

It is social democracy that plays the lead role in rehabilitating the right.

Socialist Party President François Hollande invites FN leader Marine Le Pen to the Elysee Palace. In Germany, Social Democrat leader Sigmar Gabriel proclaims that to be “right wing or a German nationalist” is a democratic right. In Britain, Labour competes with UKIP to prove it has the hardest line on immigration.

As for the trade unions, they work to paralyse the immense power of the working class and split it along national lines. Where they do make a show of opposition, demands to defend British, German, French or American jobs are invariably tied to further cuts in wages and conditions, facilitating an unending race to the bottom.

The world is again becoming a foul prison. But our appraisal of this situation has nothing in common with the demoralised schema of the pseudo-left, which is aimed at justifying their own reactionary politics.

In Greece, Syriza defends its imposition of austerity on the grounds that if it doesn't do as it is told the

fascists will take over! All while it is in coalition with the right-wing Independent Greeks whose xenophobia matches that of Golden Dawn.

Still the pseudo-left praise the “Syriza model” as the way forward. The traditional division between the “left” and “right” no longer has any meaning, they proclaim, as they attempt to justify their alliances and proposed alliances with nationalist and far-right organisations throughout Europe.

The differences between right and left may be irrelevant to the pseudo-left, but they are of paramount importance for the working class, as, in the words of Rosa Luxembour, “It is their skin that is being brought to market.”

The growth of nationalist and fascist reaction is the response of the bourgeoisie to the crisis of the capitalist nation-state system. The working class must prepare its own response—one based on the unification of working people internationally in the struggle for a socialist world.



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