

Capitalism and the global refugee crisis

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According to the United Nations, there are more refugees in the world today than at any point in recorded human history.

At the end of 2014, almost 60 million people were forcibly displaced. This is nearly three times the number recorded just a decade earlier. On a global scale, one out of every 122 people is now either a refugee, internally displaced or seeking asylum. A majority (51 percent) of the planet's refugees are below the age of 18.

Millions have been made homeless and thrown into grinding poverty as a result of imperialist-backed wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Libya. The world's largest refugee crisis is centred on Syria, where the number of those fleeing to other countries has now exceeded four million. Those who are able to do so seek refuge in Europe. That often involves a perilous trip across the Mediterranean, a journey that has taken the lives of thousands of men, women and children.

Only this week, the bodies of 49 migrants were discovered inside the hold of a fishing boat, having died of fume inhalation. This adds to the total of more than 2,300 who have perished at sea so far this year.

Frontex, the European Union's border agency, has reported that 107,500 migrants were detected at its frontiers last month. This is three times as many as in July 2014.

Thousands of refugees and asylum seekers, the vast majority fleeing the war zones of Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, attempt to reach Europe via its southern states of Greece, Italy and Spain. Since January, a total of 160,000 refugees and migrants have arrived in the various Greek islands, with more than 20,000 arriving in the last week alone. More than 100,000 have been rescued and brought to Italy this year.

This is only a small portion of those attempting to escape horrific conditions at home. Millions of refugees from Syria, for example, survive in massive city-sized

refugee camps in Jordan and Turkey. The refugees who attempt the trip to Europe are those who have managed to scrape together enough money to pay one of the people traffickers operating the boats.

This relatively small percentage of the world's refugees is treated as an existential threat by Europe's ruling elite. Refugees and migrants are routinely denounced and cast as criminals, responsible for all of society's ills, by governments and political parties of all stripes.

Speaking of just 5,000 migrants who live in appalling conditions at the port of Calais, UK Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond said, "Europe can't protect itself and preserve its standard of living and social infrastructure, if it has to absorb millions of migrants from Africa."

This week German Chancellor Angela Merkel warned in a TV interview that the arrival of thousands of refugees to the shores of the continent would "preoccupy Europe much, much more than the issue of Greece and the stability of the euro."

In Greece itself, the brutal treatment of refugees by the pseudo-left Syriza government is confirmation, if it were still needed, of its pro-capitalist, anti-working class character.

The right-wing bile emanating from official circles is echoed and magnified in an outpouring of increasingly overt xenophobic hatred hurled at refugees and asylum seekers by a hysterical media. Right-wing and fascist bands, encouraged by this putrid atmosphere, have stepped up attacks on refugees and asylum seekers. In Germany, for example, more than 200 incidents, including arson attacks on migrants' homes, have been reported this year.

Muslims in particular face the full force of this venom. This week the government of Slovakia, which is to receive just 200 Syrian refugees as part of an EU relocation scheme, said it would only accept Christians.

What is being cast as a "migrant problem" is in fact a

problem of imperialist rule and of the capitalist system. There are two root causes of the massive refugee crisis.

The first is the growing number of predatory wars being conducted by the imperialist powers and their proxies. Indeed, the United States, backed by its allies, has now been involved in perpetual war since 1991 that has displaced entire populations and destroyed entire societies.

The second major factor is the control and economic destruction of the planet by the major capitalist states that has plunged billions of people into abject poverty.

The European powers seek to insulate themselves from the results of the carnage they have wrought through the creation of a “Fortress Europe”. At its June emergency summit on refugees, the EU washed its hands in the face of growing public revulsion at the deaths of thousands in the Mediterranean. They refused to set any quotas for countries to take in the increasing numbers of desperate refugees, agreeing to relocate just 40,000 refugees already in Italy and Greece.

Instead, all efforts are concentrated on strengthening border controls. Hungary’s southern border marks the edge of the EU’s Schengen Zone of passport-free travel. The right-wing government there is building a massive fence along its 109-mile border with Serbia. This week a prime ministerial spokesman said that the fence would be “defended” by thousands of police against “increasingly aggressive” migrants.

New metres-high fortified border fences, miles in length, have been built and strengthened by Greece, Bulgaria, Spain, the UK at the Channel Tunnel port of Calais, and by other countries.

Under conditions in which the global economy is more closely interconnected and more complex than ever before in history, the capitalist system, based on the outmoded division of the planet into antagonistic nation states and private ownership of the means of production, is creating hell on earth.

In the founding programme of the Fourth International, the great revolutionary Leon Trotsky wrote on the eve of the Second World War, “Before exhausting or drowning mankind in blood, capitalism befouls the world atmosphere with the poisonous vapours of national and race hatred.”

These words are as apt today as they were then.

As with all the great problems facing humanity, the only rational solution that can prevent tens and

hundreds of millions more becoming refugees is the unification of working people internationally in the struggle for a socialist reorganization of economic life. Socialism, a society based on fulfilling human need, not profit, would rationally use and develop the earth’s abundant resources to provide a life worth living for everyone.

In pursuance of this goal and with all its collective strength, the working class must unswervingly defend the democratic rights of refugees and migrants to asylum and their right to live wherever they wish.

The international working class, the only revolutionary force on the planet, must be mobilised in order to put an end to the horrors of imperialism and the capitalist system. This task requires the building of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the world Trotskyist movement.



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