

European governments treat refugees as a hostile invasion force

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Europe is currently experiencing its biggest refugee crisis since World War II. The horrific images transmitted daily across the world recall the cruel events of that time: Exhausted and desperate refugees trapped behind barbed wire, mistreated and herded into camps, dying at sea or suffocating in trucks. In the Czech Republic, refugees have been given numbers on their arms to identify them—like the prisoners in the concentration camps run by the Nazis.

European governments treat the stream of refugees as a hostile invasion force. This was most clearly articulated by the Hungarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orban. “If we give them [the refugees] the impression that they are welcome, that would be a moral defeat,” he said in Brussels. “We must make it clear to them: Do not come.”

The remarks by Orban, an ultra-right-wing politician, have caused much phony indignation. But his “morality,” which recalls that of the Nazis and finds its highest expression in the relentless persecution of refugees, is shared by all other European governments and the European Union as a whole. They are merely somewhat more careful in their choice of words.

The measures that Hungary is currently enforcing with utmost ruthlessness—the construction of a border fence, the use of tear gas and the army against refugees, their internment in camps in deplorable hygienic conditions—have long been practiced elsewhere.

Between 2007 and 2011, the EU provided its member states 2.2 billion euros for refugees, but only a fraction of this amount has gone towards their accommodation and integration. Around half of the money, one billion euros, has flowed into border protection: the construction of fences, surveillance and controls.

Three years ago Greece and Bulgaria, supported by the EU, constructed a high-tech fence, guarded by an

army of police officers, to seal their borders with Turkey. The fence has forced hundreds of thousands of refugees to undertake the perilous route through the Mediterranean, with thousands subsequently dying at sea. The Spanish enclave of Ceuta is protected by a six-meter-high fence, in which refugees are repeatedly trapped and die like fish in a net.

The confinement of refugees under inhuman conditions is also not an invention of Orban. In Greece, similar disastrous conditions prevail, largely unreported by the media, since the country slid ever deeper into misery due to the austerity measures of the troika. Even the conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* had to admit, “that with its construction of a fence and its plan to handle asylum procedures in border areas, Hungary is only putting into practice what the Germans, Austrians and French praise as a solution and which is also demanded of Greece and Italy.”

On Friday, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President François Hollande submitted a joint letter to the EU institutions, which exposes the inhumane policies of the imperialist powers. They are pressing for the establishment of registration centers in Italy, Greece and other EU member states, along with a common definition of “safe countries of origin” and a binding system of distribution of refugees to all member countries.

The registration centers, also known as “hot spots,” are huge concentration camps, close to the border, where refugees are detained until they can be deported. The definition of “safe countries of origin” means that millions of refugees will lose their claim to legal asylum procedures.

And the German government only pushed for a distribution of refugees to all EU countries after the virtual collapse of the Dublin regulation, which

compels refugees to remain in the first EU country they enter. As long as the refugees were concentrated in Italy, Greece and other countries, Berlin had strictly rejected any change in policy.

The responsibility of European governments for the refugee crisis is not confined to their present policies. They are also responsible for the devastation that has forced millions to flee their homelands. The colonial wars carried out in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Yemen and other countries by the European powers in alliance with the United States have wiped out the economic and social infrastructure of entire societies and transformed them literally into a pile of rubble.

Imperialist violence is complemented by the social devastation resulting from the policy of austerity in Europe. Does anyone remember the promises of freedom, democracy and future prosperity, when the Iron Curtain fell and capitalism was introduced in Eastern Europe? Twenty-five years later, new walls are being built and the social situation is more desperate than ever. Hundreds of thousands have fled from Eastern Europe and the Balkans because they have no future. Now the designation as “safe countries of origin” is robbing them of any means of flight from their misery.

The brutality with which the ruling class in Europe deals with refugees is the sharpest expression of its hostility to the entire working class. It stands in stark contrast to the wave of sympathy and solidarity shown to refugees by broad sections of the population.

As already shown in Greece, where one ruthless austerity program follows the next, capitalist society has nothing to offer to the broad mass of the population other than growing poverty, repression and war. The European working class must unite and take the fate of society into its own hands. This requires the fight for a socialist program and the construction of a new, revolutionary party. The defense of refugees is an integral part of such a struggle.



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