

The refugee crisis, war and socialism

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For 14 years, the US and its European allies have been waging uninterrupted war in the Middle East and North Africa. They and their client states in the region have largely destroyed Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen. Millions have died; tens of millions are on the run.

These wars have been justified with lies. They have been presented as a “war on terror,” a fight against “weapons of mass destruction,” a response to “genocide,” a crusade for “human rights” and democracy.” Pseudo-lefts and former pacifists have surpassed themselves in devising ever-new justifications for backing imperialist wars and promoting them as humanitarian enterprises. The United Nations has invented a new doctrine—the “Responsibility to Protect”—to justify the dropping of bombs on defenceless towns and villages.

With the influx of refugees seeking to escape the living hell created by imperialism in the Middle East and North Africa, the reality of war has arrived in the centre of Europe. The ruthlessness and brutality with which these desperate individuals are treated by the state in one European country after another has once and for all torn away the mask of humanitarianism. Millions in Europe and around the world are outraged and horrified by the official treatment of hundreds of thousands of men, women and children.

Those who survive the dangerous journey across the sea must go through an ordeal lasting weeks: being held in concentration camps without minimum hygienic standards; traversing hundreds of miles on foot for days on end; enduring arbitrary and often violent treatment at the hands of a Kafkaesque bureaucracy; coming up, again and again, against closed borders, barbed wire and abusive security forces.

Scenes of official callousness and unbearable human suffering not seen in Europe since the end of World War II are repeated every day: thousands marching in

the cold and rain; families with young children stranded at a border and forced to stand in the mud without food or protection from the elements.

Even in the wealthy countries of Western Europe the ordeal continues. The UK is sealing itself off and will accommodate a mere 20,000 refugees over the next five years—a maximum of 4,000 per year.

War-ravaged Germany assimilated 12 to 14 million refugees between 1945 and 1950, almost half of them in the former East Germany. Today, it is supposedly too much for a considerably wealthier country to take in the 600,000 to 800,000 refugees who have arrived since the beginning of the year.

Catastrophic conditions prevail in the refugee camps in Germany’s cities. In Hamburg and many other cities, thousands are living in unheated, damp and drafty tents. In Berlin, they have to wait for weeks to be registered, without receiving adequate support. Those who volunteer, out of human sympathy and social solidarity, to help the people fleeing war and chaos are discouraged and undermined by the authorities.

There is a method behind the mistreatment of the refugees, one that reveals the true face of capitalism. A society that spends hundreds of billions of euros overnight to rescue ailing banks, and in which the number of billionaires is constantly rising, supposedly lacks the resources to accept refugees and provide them with decent conditions. In the age of the Internet, of worldwide air travel and global economy, there is no right to shelter, food, employment or life itself for millions of displaced people.

Leading European politicians and public figures are deliberately working to mobilize the dregs of society to establish a right-wing movement directed not only against refugees, but against the working class and all politically progressive elements in society.

They spread hateful slogans against refugees (Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán), threaten

extra-legal “emergency measures” (Bavarian Premier Horst Seehofer), berate refugees for being “arrogant” (German Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière), and warn of the destruction of the foundations of society by foreign cultures (Humboldt University Professor Jörg Baberowski).

Their rhetoric is reminiscent of the 1938 Evian refugee conference, where representatives from 32 countries met to discuss the treatment of Jews fleeing Nazi Germany. They essentially closed their borders and justified their actions with excuses about overcrowding, high unemployment and the need to maintain cultural and racial stability within their own borders. Millions of Jews would soon pay for this decision with their lives.

The fate of the refugees anticipates the future the capitalist system has to offer to all working people and youth: oppression, poverty and war. This has already been shown in the brutal austerity programme that has destroyed the living standards of the Greek working class.

In July of 2014, the International Committee of the Fourth International published the statement “Socialism and the Fight Against Imperialist War,” which warned that the imperialist powers had responded to the global financial breakdown of 2008 by accelerating their predatory race to re-divide the world.

The ICFI wrote: “Time and again they have proven their indifference to human suffering. Now, a qualitatively new stage in the crisis of imperialism has been reached—one in which the major powers are risking a nuclear conflagration...”

“The collision of imperialist and national state interests expresses the impossibility, under capitalism, of organising a globally-integrated economy on a rational foundation and thus ensuring the harmonious development of the productive forces. However, the same contradictions driving imperialism to the brink provide the objective impulse for social revolution. The globalisation of production has led to a massive growth of the working class. Only this social force, which owes no allegiance to any nation, is capable of putting an end to the profit system, which is the root cause of war.”

The fate of the refugees has confirmed this evaluation. The consequences of imperialist wars in the Middle East have arrived in Europe. The ruling elites have responded by moving sharply to the right and

intensifying their attacks on democratic and social rights.

The defence of refugees is inextricably linked to the struggle against war and capitalism. As the ICFI statement declared: “All the great issues confronting the working class—the growth of social inequality, the resort to authoritarian forms of rule—are inseparable components of this struggle. There can be no fight for socialism without a struggle against war and there can be no fight against war without a struggle for socialism.”



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