

Merkel's brutal refugee policy

Peter Schwarz
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Not long ago, a bitter conflict raged in Europe between advocates of sealing off Europe's borders and supporters of a "European solution" to the refugee crisis.

The German chancellor, who insisted most explicitly on a "European solution," was praised to the skies by liberal journalists and politicians as the "refugees' chancellor," who had finally discovered her heart for the vulnerable and persecuted. The Greens and sections of the Left Party joined in. There were even suggestions that Merkel be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Merkel's opponents accused her of national betrayal and violation of the Constitution.

Now, everyone can see what a "European solution" means: sealing off Europe's borders. War refugees, who have risked the life-threatening journey across the Aegean Sea, are detained, mistreated and sent back to Turkey, where they are interned once again by the Turkish government and then returned to their country of origin.

The concentration camps on Greek islands surrounded by barbed-wire fences, the batons and tear gas canisters with which Macedonian border police assault defenceless refugees, and the bureaucratic ruthlessness with which desperate people are bullied and expelled throughout Europe recall the grimmest chapter in German history.

German interior minister Thomas de Maizière recently declared in an interview that people wishing to live in Germany had to "know German culture and recognise our basic values." He added that everyone must "know what happened at Auschwitz." Given the conditions along the borders of Europe and in the internment camps, refugees can understand this only as a personal threat.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has repeatedly warned that Merkel and the "advocates of a European solution" are not concerned with the fate of the refugees. In

October of last year, we wrote that Merkel was trying to buy time: "She appears with refugees and strikes the pose of a Mother Theresa, while she works intensively on sealing off Europe's external borders and restricting the right to asylum."

One month later, we explained that the conflicts within the German government had "less to do with the treatment of refugees—all factions encourage deterrence measures and the restriction of the right to asylum—than with the orientation of foreign policy." Merkel's opponents were calling "for a total shutdown of the borders," while her supporters feared that "this could tear apart and destroy the European Union." The latter were "of the opinion that Germany needs the European Union to be able to play the role of a world power again, and can therefore not afford to overplay the nationalist card."

It is now clear that Merkel's "European solution" is no less brutal than the policy of her nationalist opponents. This has, however, not stopped her defenders from continuing to support her. The Greens are preparing to form a government with Merkel's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) at the federal level. Left Party politician Gregor Gysi has also recommended that his party collaborate with the CDU.

Although there is still massive popular support for the refugees, nobody within the media or official politics defends them any longer. Interior Minister de Maizière told a party meeting that it was necessary to remain tough in the face of "ugly pictures from the Greek-Macedonian border." He added that "This can be withstood."

In Greece, Syriza, the Left Party's sister party, is the main accomplice of Merkel and the EU in the brutal treatment of refugees. The Tsipras government has robbed refugees of their rights by changing the law and deployed the police and military to round them up and deport them.

The attacks on refugees not only expose the right-wing character of these parties, they also shed a revealing light on the character of the EU. It is not an instrument to unite the continent, but a tool of the most powerful financial and industrial interests to subordinate Europe to their diktat, attack the working class, and arm the police and military.

The crackdown on refugees flows from the austerity measures with which the EU has plunged broad layers of the working class in Greece and other European countries into severe poverty. The ruling class has responded to growing social tensions and anger by stoking up xenophobia, strengthening the state apparatus, and preparing authoritarian forms of rule. It is preparing the way for far-right and fascist forces, which are gaining ground in many European countries. The measures directed against refugees today will be imposed on the entire working class tomorrow.

The protection of refugees, the defence of democratic rights, the resistance to social attacks and the struggle against war and militarism are inseparable. There is not a single establishment party in Europe prepared to lift a finger to achieve these aims. The building of a new workers' party—one that organises opposition to war, dictatorship and welfare cuts, and provides an independent political perspective—is therefore the most urgent task.

Such a perspective is advanced only by the Socialist Equality Party and the International Committee of the Fourth International. We fight for a socialist programme to unite the international working class in the struggle against capitalism. Our answer to the European Union of the banks and corporations is the United Socialist States of Europe.



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