

May Day 2017

Oppose the persecution of immigrants and refugees

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This speech was delivered by Julie Hyland, Assistant National Secretary of the Socialist Equality Party in the UK, to the 2017 International May Day Online Rally held on April 30.

The International Committee of the Fourth International stands in solidarity with the millions of refugees and migrants across the world. We defend the right of all workers to live and work where they choose, with full citizenship rights.

This unshakeable commitment—the keystone of any workers’ organisation worthy of the name—is in stark contrast to what passes for much of the left today.

Bernie Sanders in the US, Melenchon in France, Lafontaine in Germany and Corbyn in Britain all reject the principle of free movement and, in many instances, even call for the reinforcing of borders—supposedly to protect native-born workers.

In this way they facilitate the efforts of their governments to foment hatred of immigrants, in order to split the working class and divert attention from the real source of workers’ suffering, the capitalist system.

As a consequence, the only time migrants are mentioned in the media is as sexual predators, drug dealers or terrorists. The identities of those targeted may change—Mexicans in the US, Syrians in Europe, or that favoured catch-all, “Muslims.” But the rhetoric is borrowed straight from the playbook of the Nazis and their demonising of the supposedly “criminal Jew.”

In reality, just as it was 70 years ago, these impoverished and vulnerable workers and children are the victims of monstrous crimes committed by the imperialist powers.

Fifteen years of the so-called “war on terror”—the pretext for a renewal of colonialist war and plunder in

the Middle East and elsewhere—have produced the greatest migration crisis since World War II. More than 65.5 million people are refugees, not counting the 14 million plus, who are internally displaced.

In the time it takes me to make these remarks, nearly 300 people will have been forced from their homes somewhere in the world. That’s almost 3,000 people by the end of the rally, and more than 35,000 by the end of today. If refugees were a country they would form the 22nd largest in the world—larger than the UK, Italy or South Africa.

Already, more than half the world’s refugees are from Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia. But in the last weeks, the Trump administration—backed by the European governments—has bombed Syria and dropped the largest ever non-nuclear MOAB bomb on Afghanistan, while US forces have gone back into Somalia as part of ongoing efforts to install a puppet government.

This is the situation even without the menacing of North Korea and China, and the provocations against Moscow—all of which threaten a third world war.

Each Tomahawk missile dropped on Syria costs up to \$1.5 million. The price tag for a single MOAB is \$16 million. The US defence shield (THAAD), being installed in South Korea, costs an estimated \$1 billion, while \$100 billion is spent annually on nuclear weapons by nuclear-armed nations, \$12 million every hour.

Yet, while the imperialist powers squander vast sums to destroy entire countries, the victims of their aggression—those who remain alive at least—are left in abject squalor.

More than 90 percent of all refugees never make it to

the West, but are forced into countries already wracked by poverty and conflict.

In Libya, modern-day slave markets have opened—trading in African refugees to be used as forced labour or for sexual exploitation. The going rate is between \$200 and \$500. Those who are not bought, and who are unable to reach a place of safety, often starve and are buried in unmarked graves, earning Libya the title of the “valley of tears.”

Uganda, one of the poorest countries in the world, hosts the largest refugee camp on the continent, Bidi, home to more than a quarter of a million people—mainly women and children, most from Southern Sudan.

After six years of the western-instigated civil war, Syrians account for the largest number of refugees. Many are trapped in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon. Without the right to work, most live below the poverty line. As a result, in Lebanon, the trade in illegal organs is booming, as desperate refugees—including minors—are forced to sell their body parts to keep themselves and their families alive.

Those who do manage to flee the mass killing and destruction inflicted on their countries and the surrounding region, do not fare much better.

Once again, this year the death toll in the Mediterranean is set to be a record, with 1,000 drowning, in the last four months alone, in their desperate attempt to reach Europe. If and when they do, they are met with barbed wire, concentration camps and racist agitation.

In Greece and Italy, where many are stranded as a result of the European Union’s “Fortress Europe” policy, refugee camps are squalid, lacking decent sanitation, water and food supplies. The camps in these countries alone include at least 23,000 unaccompanied children, many of them orphans.

In Calais, refugees report “endemic” levels of brutality by police and right-wing groups, with 97 percent of the children surveyed reporting attacks, including tear gassing and having limbs dislocated.

A study of Syrian refugees who managed to reach the UK, found that 93 percent had witnessed what was described as “explosive violence.” Yet the British government screams about allowing passage to the few hundred unaccompanied Syrian children, even as it champs at the bit to join the US bombing of that country.

Such cruelty is not accidental. It is deliberate. The rising tide of national chauvinist poison is a damning expression of the bankruptcy of the nation state system to which capitalism is tied. It goes hand in hand with the erection of trade barriers and a new eruption of trade and currency wars, as the bourgeoisie in every country seeks to resolve its crisis at the expense of its rivals and the working class.

At the same time, the reign of terror against refugees is used to build up a police-state apparatus in every country that will be employed against all workers, as they seek to defend jobs, living standards and oppose the descent into militarism and war.

Against the jingo-leftists, the International Committee stands in the proud tradition of Marxism, and its insistence that working people have no country. The entire world is ours to win.

We stand for the international unity of the working class in the fight for world socialist revolution. This begins with rejecting the attempts to divide native-born and immigrant workers. Only by uniting their class strength across all national boundaries, in a common struggle against imperialism and the global financial oligarchy, can workers advance their own independent solution to the world economic crisis: the reorganisation of the world economy to meet social need, not private profit.



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