

Anti-migrant measures and the assault on workers' jobs and living standards: Two sides of the same class policy

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Julie Hyland, assistant national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party (UK), the British section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, delivered the following speech to the ICFI's Online May Day Rally. She has been a leading member of the IC for more than 30 years.

This May Day online rally, held on the 200th anniversary of the birth of Karl Marx, extends its solidarity to the 65.6 million people displaced from their homes due to war, famine, poverty and persecution: approximately one in every 100 people on the planet—the largest number ever recorded.

Marx would have understood, only too well, their plight. He was himself a political refugee—expelled from Germany, France and Belgium for his revolutionary writings, stateless aged just 27, and living in poverty in England for the remaining majority portion of his life.

The grim reality of class relations, laid bare so unsparingly by Marx, explains why, today, there is hardly a safe-haven anywhere in the world.

A political refugee in England now can expect the type of treatment meted out to WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, forced to shelter in the Ecuadorian embassy for almost six years, and deprived of all communications for exposing imperialist criminality.

The UK government recently admitted to imposing a “hostile environment” against migrants that has ensnared even members of the so-called “Windrush generation.” Workers from the Caribbean, who have lived, worked and raised families in the supposed “Mother Country” for decades, have been threatened with deportation, and denied housing, medical treatment, work and pensions.

There is nothing accidental or peculiar about such actions. A hostile environment to migrants and refugees is exactly what has been created by the ruling elites across the globe, as a deliberate policy.

In the United States, the right to asylum is under historic attack. In the shadow of the Statue of Liberty, migrants are now hunted down in Gestapo-like raids, shackled and

deported, while nearly 200 migrants escaping violence, war and poverty in Central America, were left abandoned on the border for days when immigration officials deliberately delayed their applications.

On Manus Island, Papua New Guinea, a sadistic crackdown has taken place against refugees protesting their forcible removal to another off-shore detention centre. The Australian government insists they must not be allowed to set foot on the mainland at any cost. To force them to submit, water and electricity to the facility have been cut off and medical supplies terminated to hundreds of people, including children, some of whom have attempted suicide over their conditions.

In Israel—another nation of immigrants—hundreds of African refugees are currently being rounded up and detained indefinitely in a prison in the Negev desert. Meanwhile, Palestinians protesting their enforced exile from their own land are mowed down by Israeli soldiers.

The picture is no better in Europe.

In Germany, under the most right-wing government since the Nazis, politicians speak openly of a “final solution to the refugee issue,” while Chancellor Merkel adopts the language of the AfD to blame refugees for causing division in the country.

In France, only last month the government passed a draconian bill further restricting the right to asylum. President Macron has pompously declared, “We cannot take in all the misery of the world.”

His statement sums up the callous indifference of the ruling elite. While they must be free to cause misery and mayhem globally, their victims can expect no sanctuary or protection.

This is the reality of bourgeois democracy in the epoch of its disintegration.

What is described as “the refugee problem” is really the problem of imperialism. The western powers bomb Syria, increase their military interventions in the Middle East and

Africa, and threaten Iran, Russia and China.

These reckless actions account for the vast increase in the numbers of refugees—most of whom are trapped in dire circumstances in countries themselves menaced by western intrigue such as Lebanon, Pakistan, Ethiopia, Uganda and Iran.

The closest to Europe many will ever get is to Turkey—now host to 3.5 million Syrians. The European Union routinely denounces Turkey as authoritarian, but it is only too happy to pay it to be its border guard.

Working people must be under no misapprehension. The policies employed against refugees will be turned against them.

And this is the case, irrespective of whether the parties in charge are nominally left or right, progressive or conservative.

It is not merely that the Democrats remain silent in the face of Donald Trump's fascistic measures—they collude with them, as evidenced by the decision of California's Democratic governor, Jerry Brown, to deploy 400 soldiers to the border at Trump's request.

Or we can take the example of the Syriza government—the so-called Coalition of the Radical Left—in Greece, which functions as another principal border guard for the EU. More than a million refugees have passed through Greek islands such as Lesbos in the last three years. Thousands are still forcibly detained in inhumane conditions, overwhelming already dwindling resources and services and subject to violent attacks by far-right groups.

This is not the unfortunate result of demands made of Syriza against its will. It is the outcome of the calculated political decision made by Alexis Tsipras and his pseudo-left allies, when they betrayed a massive mandate to fight austerity, and joined forces with the EU to impose its assault on working people.

The measures against refugees and migrants, and the attack on workers' jobs and living standards, are two sides of the same class policy.

Poverty and unemployment now rival war as major causes of migration. Nearly 250 million people are classed as international migrants—forced to leave their homes and families in search of work.

The cause is clear. While, especially since 2008, working people everywhere have seen significant falls in their living standards, the wealth of the world's richest 1 percent has been growing at an average of 6 percent a year. Just 42 people own the same amount of wealth as the poorest 50 percent worldwide.

You will search in vain for a single significant policy to redress this glaring social inequality in the programme of Bernie Sanders, Jeremy Corbyn, Jean-Luc Mélenchon et al.

Yet they, like others in the trade unions and pseudo-left parties, support restrictions on freedom of movement, especially against those deemed to be “economic migrants,” on the specious basis that this is in the best interests of the working class. Some even claim that they are following the policy of Karl Marx!

Such a monstrous distortion cannot be allowed to stand. These organisations have nothing in common with the founder of scientific socialism. Their call for border controls is the outcome of their perspective of national economic regulation under capitalism.

Not only is this diametrically opposed to the perspective of revolutionary socialist internationalism elaborated by Marx. Their defence of the state apparatus leads inexorably to support for police state measures at home and imperialist war abroad.

Marx was very clear on these questions, and his conclusion to the inaugural address of the International Working Men's Association (the First International) in 1864 is of immense contemporary relevance.

“Past experience” he said, “has shown how disregard of that bond of brotherhood which ought to exist between the workmen of different countries, and incites them to stand firmly by each other in all their struggles for emancipation, will be chastised by the common discomfiture of their incoherent efforts.”

It was the duty of the working classes “to master themselves the mysteries of international politics; to watch the diplomatic acts of their respective governments; to counteract them, if necessary, by all means in their power,” and, “when unable to prevent, to combine in simultaneous denunciations, and to vindicate the simple laws or morals and justice which ought to govern the relations of private individuals ...”

“The fight for such a foreign policy forms part of the general struggle for the emancipation of the working classes.

“Proletarians of all countries, unite!”

This is the perspective carried forward today only by the ICFI and the *World Socialist Web Site*.



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