

Ahead of Brussels summit, EU steps up attacks on refugees

Alex Lantier
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As today's European Union (EU) summit begins in Brussels, the EU powers are rivaling one another to demand draconian measures against refugees.

On Tuesday, Austria mobilized a vast force of heavily-armed riot police, armored vehicles and helicopters to shut its border with Slovenia. As Vienna prepares to take over the EU's rotating presidency, it was signaling that the EU is set to escalate the attacks on refugees now taking place.

After Italy's new far-right government stranded 629 starving men, women and children on the rescue ship *Aquarius*, reports emerged that 220 refugees had drowned in the Mediterranean off Libya. Italy's neo-fascist Interior Minister Matteo Salvini responded by refusing to let the rescue ship *Lifeline* disembark in Italy. The EU-funded Libyan coast guard also intercepted ships carrying 460 migrants and sent them to Libyan detention camps.

In the camps set up with EU support since the 2011 NATO war in Libya, tens of thousands of innocent people endure hell on earth. Reports by the United Nations and human rights groups have documented how refugees in the EU's Libyan camps are assaulted, raped, sold into slavery, or murdered. Echoing the French government, Salvini is now calling for more such camps to be built in Libya—while the EU works with Turkey and other Middle East countries to detain millions fleeing war in Iraq and Syria.

The EU is now pressing these countries to commit atrocities to keep refugees from reaching Europe. In the last year, Algeria has forced over 13,000 African refugees into death marches back southward across the Sahara Desert. Many, including pregnant women and children, have died. EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini responded to this report only by pledging more funds for “migrant screening” in North Africa.

Now, these policies are to come home to Europe. As this weekend's EU mini-summit on migration collapsed, rival proposals emerged to expand the network of EU “hot spot” camps—little more than concentration camps—for migrants in Italy and Greece. EU Council President Donald Tusk called for camps in Albania and Tunisia, while Paris and Madrid proposed “closed detention centers” in the main EU countries.

After pledging to deport 600,000 people, Salvini is moving to register the Roma population, which was targeted for genocide by the Nazis, and calling for deporting all of them, though he added that “unfortunately, we have to keep the Italians among them.”

Millions of people across Europe and around the world are horrified at the EU's barbaric treatment of the refugees, as the European bourgeoisie moves towards policies of mass state terror and ethnic cleansing on a scale not seen since the Nazi era. To fight this offensive, however, requires a revolutionary perspective and strategy. Moral appeals to one or another faction of the ruling elite, all of which support the persecution of the refugees, will do nothing to resolve a crisis rooted in the breakdown of world capitalism.

This fascistic offensive can only be opposed via the independent, international mobilization of the working class in struggle on a socialist and anti-war program.

The present refugee crisis is the greatest since World War II. It stems from a quarter century of neo-colonial wars and interventions across the Middle East and Africa, carried out in defiance of broad popular opposition, since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Over 60 million people have fled wars in Iraq, the Balkans, Afghanistan, Syria, Libya, Mali and across the Sahel.

A new stage of this international crisis has been reached with the emergence of direct inter-imperialist conflicts between Washington and its EU “allies”. After the G7 summit collapsed over the mutual imposition of trade-war tariffs by US and EU authorities, the EU is aiming to develop as a military rival of the United States, Russia and China. The move toward unbridled militarism and the formation of competing trade blocs internationally goes hand in hand with attacks on democratic rights at home.

The alarm must be sounded: as in the 1930s, fascistic policies target not just refugees but the entire working class. Last year, the EU’s Generation What survey, which found that a majority of Europeans under 35 oppose joining the army but would support participating a “mass uprising.” If the workers let the EU consolidate its concentration camps and police agencies, this apparatus of police-state terror will be turned on political opposition in the working class.

Workers across Europe are increasingly mobilizing against austerity policies designed to funnel hundreds of billions of euros into the war machine. Rail, airline and energy workers in France, metalworkers in Germany and Turkey, and airline and retail workers in Spain have taken strike action. The EU’s turn to the extreme right is a sign that, as in the 1930s, the question to be settled is which class will rule. It is urgent to unify workers struggles across Europe in a common fight for state power.

This struggle can only proceed in opposition to unions and petty bourgeois parties across Europe, like Syriza in Greece, Podemos in Spain, the New Anti-capitalist Party in France, or the Left Party in Germany. Having backed the Libyan and Syrian wars as “democratic revolutions,” they are now falling in line with or in fact actively overseeing the EU’s anti-immigrant campaign.

The Syriza government is running EU “hot spots” in Greece, while Podemos is the main prop of the social democratic minority government in Spain that, after taking in the Aquarius, has insisted that it will not serve as a European refuge for immigrants fleeing anti-immigrant policies elsewhere.

Opposing the EU’s offensive requires the independent organization of workers in workplace and neighborhood committees to coordinate resistance and strikes against police raids and attacks on immigrants

and refugees. The defense of fundamental democratic rights requires:

- * The dismantling of detention camps in the Middle East and North Africa, the withdrawal of European and US troops from these regions, and the free and safe passage of refugees to EU countries of their choice.

- * The dismantling of EU “hot spot” concentration camps, and the granting of legal status to all refugees and undocumented immigrants in Europe.

- * The abolition of the EU’s Frontex border police.

- * Noncooperation with the EU deportation machine and all state policies preparing ethnic cleansing.

- * The provision of trillions of euros in public services, training, and jobs to all workers, immigrant and native-born alike. The wealth squandered on a decade of EU bank bailouts must be expropriated and used to meet the urgent social needs of the working population.

In its emerging conflict with a European bourgeoisie moving rapidly towards far-right forms of rule, the working class will have no other choice than to take the revolutionary road. Events are blowing apart the claim that the dissolution of the USSR and the formation of the EU a year later signaled an end to the 20th century era of wars and social revolutions. A return to the traditions of irreconcilable struggle embodied in the October 1917 Revolution and the struggle against fascism is essential to averting new catastrophes in the 21st century.

Above all, the critical task is the international unification of the working class in a revolutionary struggle for socialism. In Europe, this means the overthrow of the capitalist EU and its replacement by the United Socialist States of Europe.



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