

“Protecting the European way of life” and “a stronger Europe in the world”

New EU Commission to intensify militarism and attacks on refugees

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Ursula von der Leyen, the former German defense minister and incoming head of the European Commission (EC), unveiled her proposed team of commissioners in a press conference last Tuesday. The nominations and titles of the new posts are another marker of the extraordinary pace with which the European ruling class is moving to the right. The incoming EC will oversee an escalation of militarism, vicious attacks on refugees and the elevation of fascist and far-right forces against the working class across the European Union.

The most widely commented upon change is to the portfolio covering immigration and refugees. It was previously titled “Migration, interior affairs and citizenship.” Henceforth it will be named “Vice-president for protecting the European way of life.” It covers not only migration, but responsibility for policing Europe’s external borders and internal security, as well as education and employment policies.

The new title, which associates restricting migrations with protecting a so-called European “way of life,” is a direct reprise of the tropes of the modern-day fascist right and would have pleased Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels himself.

For example, a major theme advanced by French fascist ideologue Renaud Camus, in his *The Great Replacement*, is that migration to Europe threatens to replace—i.e., extinguish—European “identity” and culture. Camus’s “theory” was cited by Brenton Tarrant, the fascist terrorist who gunned down 50 Muslim worshipers at two churches in Christchurch, New Zealand, on March 15, in the manifesto he published shortly before the attack. Tarrant’s manifesto opposed what he called an immigrant “invasion” to the west.

The introductory letter from von der Leyen to Margaritis Schinas, a former European Parliament member for the Greek conservative party New Democracy who will fill the

role, includes passages that could have been culled directly from the publications of the extreme right. Protecting the “European way of life,” von der Leyen states, “highlights the need for well-managed legal migration, a strong focus on integration and ensuring our communities are cohesive and close-knit.”

“We must address and allay legitimate fears and concerns about the impact of irregular migration on economy and society,” she states. Those whose “legitimate fears” von der Leyen has in mind are evidently the far right, with whom she makes clear the EC will collaborate: “Building a consensus for a fresh start on migration will require outreach, consultation and close cooperation.” Schinas should “lead this work by focusing on building bridges between those most entrenched,” she writes.

Von der Leyen’s overtures are entirely in line with the current policies of the European Union, which has promoted far-right forces across the continent, and the German Grand Coalition of which she has been a part. The Grand Coalition has elevated the fascist Alternative for Germany (AfD) to the official opposition in Parliament, and defended the right-wing extremist Humboldt University professor Jorg Baberowski—who infamously remarked that “Hitler was not vicious”—from criticisms by students who have opposed his efforts to justify the revival of German militarism by relativizing the crimes of the Nazis. The German intelligence agency, the Verfassungsschutz, has placed the German Socialist Equality Party on a list of left-wing extremists because it opposes capitalism, militarism, fascism and seeks to build a socialist movement of the working class.

The European bourgeoisie is shifting so far to the right that it is increasingly dispensing even with the hypocritical humanitarian titles that it previously bestowed to its right-wing policies. This has provoked consternation even among bourgeois figures in the media and political establishment.

Even outgoing European Commission head Jean-Claude Juncker has expressed his concern at the renaming of the immigration post. There have been statements of opposition from individual members of European Parliament, and on Wednesday, the European Parliament voted for a motion by the French MEP for the Greens Karima Delli, protesting the announcement.

These protests are completely cynical and fraudulent. The European Union has overseen a policy of mass murder toward refugees for years, including deliberately canceling rescue ships in the Mediterranean to drown thousands of refugees in the continent's southern sea as a deterrent to other asylum seekers. All the parties protesting the latest name change support the attack on migrants but want to give their own variant a less accurate title. They know their policies are unpopular in the population and fear an eruption of opposition from below.

Von der Leyen also announced that the foreign relations portfolio will be renamed as the commission for "A Stronger Europe in the World." It will be headed by the current foreign minister in Spain's Socialist Workers Party government, Josep Borrell.

He will be responsible for overseeing a more aggressive military policy by the European Union against its major geopolitical rivals, including Russia, China and the United States, and escalating predatory operations to secure access to markets and resources for European imperialism.

We must "build our partnership with the USA, although we have issues, but they are our closest allies; define our relation with a more self-assertive China; be a more reliable neighbor, for example to Africa," von der Leyen said. The foreign relations portfolio will become a "geopolitical commission." She concluded by declaring that "the world needs more Europe. The world is calling for more Europe."

By a more "responsible neighbor" for Africa, von der Leyen has in mind an expansion of the ongoing seven-year occupation of resource-rich Mali and the Sahel led by French imperialism in alliance with Germany; the backing for African dictators such as Egypt's Abdel el-Sisi; the wars for regime change as in Libya in 2011; and the establishment of more concentration camps across the continent to hold asylum seekers.

There is no support for these policies, whose logical outcome is the waging of nuclear war with European imperialism's geopolitical rivals, in the working class. It is the working class that will be forced to pay for the ruling elite's militarization through austerity against its social rights and living standards. That is why, as in the 1930s, the ruling class is turning once again to the promotion of far-right and fascist forces.

Other nominations for the EC also indicate a more

aggressive policy by the major EU powers.

Margrethe Vestager will be vice-president of an expanded portfolio, "Europe fit for the digital age." She will retain the competition portfolio, in addition to overseeing regulation of the technology sector. This indicates that the EU will intensify its measures aimed at restricting the power of the major US-based technology companies inside Europe, including Facebook, Google and Twitter.

Vestager had been labeled the "tax lady" by US President Donald Trump after she handed out fines to American technology companies, including €8 billion to Google. Yesterday, French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire announced that France would block Facebook from deploying its new cryptocurrency, Libra, on the continent.

The EU's restrictions on US-based technology companies are not only directed at Washington but are aimed at strengthening the powers of the EU member states to censor the internet and suppress growing opposition in the working class. In another indication of the turn toward authoritarianism and building up of a police state, the commission for enlargement to oversee the introduction of new member states to the EU will be operated by Laszlo Trocsanyi, an ally of the far-right Hungarian premier Viktor Orbán who helped to craft Orbán's reforms placing the judiciary under the control of the executive.

The announcement of the new slate of EC commissioners is another confirmation that there is no progressive faction of the European bourgeois political establishment. The working class across the continent confronts a ruling elite that is shifting sharply to the right, preparing for war and establishing the forces of dictatorship to respond to a growing international movement of the working class.



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