Thousands of refugees dying amid fascistic European anti-migrant campaign

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The European working class must oppose the vicious anti-migrant campaign raging in every country on the continent.

Language historically associated with the fascist right has become commonplace in Europe's parliaments and media, portraying desperate people seeking work and safety as an invasion to be repelled at all costs.

Fascistic individuals and organisations like Italy's Mussolini-admiring Giorgia Meloni, Marine Le Pen in France, Spain's Francoist Vox party and the AfD in Germany are being welcomed into mainstream bourgeois politics. They are setting the tone for levels of xenophobia not seen in Europe in decades.

This week, the Polish government announced a foul, provocative referendum in response to the European Union's new migrant allocation mechanism on the question, "Do you support the admission of thousands of illegal immigrants from the Middle East and Africa?"

The British government is demonising not only migrants—being herded into legionnaires-infected prison ships—but even the lawyers who represent them.

Everywhere, the traditional right-wing parties are joined in their anti-migrant policies by social democratic and pseudo-left governments or can count on their support from the opposition.

European governments are the architects of an anti-migrant infrastructure unprecedented anywhere on the planet: a system of heavily policed walls, fences and razor-wire, detention camps, and agreements with brutal militias and regimes on the continent's periphery, combined to create a "Fortress Europe."

The military term is appropriate. The European ruling class is at war with the mass of humanity deprived of the most basic conditions of life by imperialist violence and capitalist inequality.

Among the significantly increased numbers of people who began applying for asylum in Europe in 2015 and 2016, the largest national groups were from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, fleeing imperialist wars and proxy wars which have destroyed their societies. Others fled grinding poverty, repressive governments, violent internal conflicts and the destruction wrought by climate change.

To this nightmare scenario has since been added rising food prices driven by the NATO-Russia war in Ukraine, itself the source of four million Ukrainian refugees, and emerging debt crises and massive social cutbacks exacerbated by the pandemic and global interest rate rises.

As the number of people attempting the journey to Europe grows again, they confront a multi-billion-euro apparatus across a vast geographical front, running from the west coast of Morocco to Turkey, from the borders of Europe to the southern Sahara.

The recent coup in Niger and the threat of a regional war has highlighted the first line of defence in the Sahel region of Africa—what the EU's High Representative for the Sahel Ángel Losada called Europe's "forward border." Here and in Sudan—two gateways to the Sahara—European money cynically labelled as "humanitarian aid" funds border controls that have forced migrants to take more dangerous routes, policed by forces with proven records of human rights abuses.

The United Nations has previously suggested that the number of refugee deaths in the Sahara is likely to be at least double that in the Mediterranean, which currently stands at 27,845 since 2014, according to the International Organization for Migration's admittedly conservative estimate.

Even more money is given to Turkey and North Africa to stop crossings into Europe. A €6 billion deal was agreed between the EU and the Turkish government in 2016 for increased border security and the blanket deportation of asylum seekers out of Europe to Turkey.

Funding agreements with Libya and Tunisia see lawless militias employed as border guards. NGOs attempting to rescue ships in distress are shot at by the coastguard. Captured migrants are beaten and electrocuted, robbed if there is anything left to steal, taken back to land and kept in a shadowy network of internment camps where torture, extortion, forced labour and slavery are rife. Many are

deported south and left stranded in the desert.

Ships bound for Europe attempt ever more dangerous crossings to avoid this fate, turning the Mediterranean and stretches of the North African coastline into graveyards. Europe's Frontex border force plays its part, illegally pushing migrant ships out of EU waters, while southern European states pass laws to impede humanitarian organisations and threaten their staff with legal charges.

On the European mainland, each country is strengthening its borders against its neighbours, creating a gauntlet of barbed wire, metal fencing and violent patrols. Where migrants succeed in crossing one border, they are frequently herded to the next, passing through a series of makeshift camps.

Reinforcing these policies, the EU agreed a new migration plan in Luxembourg this June providing for fast-track deportations, including to countries with which failed asylum seekers have the most tenuous connection—including states travelled through on the journey to Europe. The UK's efforts to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda follow the same policy.

No crime is too great. This June, more than 600 migrants travelling in a fishing vessel were drowned as a result of the actions of the Greek coastguard. Though they attempted to cover it up, investigations have proved the Greek authorities had attempted to unsafely tow the boat out of their national waters, causing it to capsize.

This story and others like it barely break the surface of corporate news reporting. And when mass drownings occur, they only fuel the xenophobic demands of the media and political establishment to "Stop the Boats!"

These killings are only the visible tip of an iceberg of human suffering.

A fraction of the world's 108 million-plus forcibly displaced people ever makes it near Europe or any rich country. Fully 70 percent never get further than a neighbouring state. Most live in hellish conditions in slums and refugee camps throughout Africa and Asia.

Amid this social catastrophe, European politicians are tearing up their legal commitments to human rights laws and conventions, passed following the Second World War and in the shadow of the Holocaust, like so many pieces of scrap paper.

Europe's ruthless war on migrants is the spearhead of a right-wing assault by the bourgeoisie aimed at the entire working class. The violent deprivation of masses of people of their most basic democratic and social rights is being normalised and will become more widespread as the Ukraine war and economic crises deepen. The argument that a society riddled with millionaires and billionaires somehow "cannot afford" to take in another migrant worker is used to cut social services and support for native workers.

The demonisation of migrants is used to divert social anger at these conditions away from its legitimate super-rich targets to impoverished scapegoats from other countries, whipping up divisions to break apart solidarity within the international working class and counter the rise of strikes and protests across the continent. This provides the ideological fuel for right-wing organisations making significant gains in parliaments all over Europe because widespread outrage at the treatment of asylum seekers can find no political expression in the social democratic and trade union bureaucracy.

Defending migrants is a fundamental responsibility of the working class in the advanced capitalist countries. Their own future depends on it. Workers in Europe must champion the right of all to live where they choose, free from repression and enjoying access to all the necessities of life like a job, a home, education and healthcare. This is the only way to oppose the drive by Europe's ruling elite to impose savage austerity and authoritarian forms of rule on everyone.

Such a struggle is inseparable from the fight against imperialist war, which will continue shattering societies and uprooting millions until it is finally ended by the socialist organisation of the world's resources.

This means a fight against capitalism, whose division of a global economy into antagonistic nation states and private ownership of the essential means of production is the root cause of wars and economic exploitation and oppression. A social system in which hundred-billion-dollar fortunes are piled up by a few individuals at one end and over 100 million people are forced to leave their homes with nothing at the other has long since lost its right to exist.

"Fortress Europe" must be torn down as part of a global reckoning with capitalism and replaced by the United Socialist States of Europe.