

Denmark's Social Democratic government leads Europe's vicious anti-immigrant crackdown, allied with Italy's fascist Meloni

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Denmark's Social Democrat-led government has used its six-month chairmanship of the European Union (EU) Council to expand the country's cooperation with fascist Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, especially in the fields of immigration and refugee policy.

This strategy culminated Monday with the decision by EU interior ministers to adopt a hardline package escalating the persecution of immigrants, including by expanding the list of countries that people can be deported to and clearing the way for the establishment of "return hubs" outside the EU.

The decision was applauded by Denmark's Social Democrat integration minister, Rasmus Stoklund, who enthused over the "huge change in perception" over recent years on immigration.

Copenhagen has long pursued a hardline approach on immigration, which the Social Democrats have spearheaded by embracing wholesale the far right's policy demands. The "Danish model," formerly held up by liberal reformists to bolster their claim that capitalism could be "humanised," now inspires far-right parties and governments across the continent.

In May this year, Prime Minister Mette Fredriksen joined Meloni to initiate a letter ultimately signed by nine EU states that called for a break with the European Convention of Human Rights. The letter also demanded the curtailing of the European Court of Human Rights's ability to enforce basic rights like the right to asylum and right to residency. The document advanced the typical arguments of Europe's far right, demanding "more room nationally to decide when to expel criminal foreign nationals." It denounced ECHR decisions that have "in some cases limited our ability to make political decisions" and insisted, "There is much more to be done before Europe regains control of irregular migration."

The letter appealed for an expansion of state surveillance, stating, "We need more freedom to decide on how our authorities can keep track of for example criminal foreigners who cannot be deported from our territories. Criminals who cannot be deported even though they have taken advantage of our hospitality to commit crime and make others feel unsafe." Additionally, the letter urged for more leeway to use migration as a justification for economic sanctions and military operations against third countries, declaring, "We need to be able to take effective steps to counter hostile states that are trying to use our values and rights against us.

For example, by instrumentalising migrants at our borders."

Meloni, an admirer of the fascist dictator Mussolini, heads a government that is notorious for systematically blocking efforts by private humanitarian organisations to rescue refugees in the Mediterranean, where thousands drown every year due to the EU's "Fortress Europe" policies. Italy is working to set up a "return hub" for asylum seekers in Albania, where applications would be processed outside of the EU's borders.

The fact that Frederiksen and Denmark's Social Democrats solidarise themselves with this record and demand that Europe's governments go even further exposes the hostility to basic principles of international law throughout Europe's entire political establishment, in both its nominal "left" and right flanks.

Denmark has pursued one of the strictest anti-immigrant courses in Europe for over two decades. When governments want to launch crackdowns on migrant rights, like Keir Starmer's Labour government in Britain, they cite Denmark as a model.

During the 2000s, Anders Fogh Rasmussen's right-wing government, led by the Liberals (Venstre), integrated the far-right Danish People's Party (DF) into the political establishment and implemented many of its most xenophobic policy proscriptions. In 2002, the government abolished Denmark's commitment to grant asylum on humanitarian grounds, slashed the welfare benefits paid to refugees, and made it much harder for immigrants to gain residency.

When the Social Democrats were returned to power in 2011, they retained all of the anti-immigrant measures enforced by their right-wing predecessors, while implementing austerity measures in response to the global economic crisis. Four years later, a re-elected Venstre government went even further with the adoption of Denmark's infamous "Jewellery Law," a provision permitting the authorities to confiscate jewellery and other personal belongings from refugees worth more than 10,000 kroner (about €1,500) to help pay for their accommodation. Inger Støjberg, the minister who oversaw the introduction of the law, subsequently set up her own far-right party, the Denmark Democrats, after the Liberals expelled her for lying to parliament about the prevalence of "child marriages" in the country.

Another discriminatory measure directed against immigrants is Denmark's so-called "ghetto" rules. First introduced in 2010 and then modified by the Venstre-led government in 2018 to

specifically target “non-Western” populations, the rules allow authorities to designate a neighbourhood a “ghetto” or “hard ghetto” if at least half of its population is deemed “non-Western,” and it meets two or more criteria. The criteria include low income levels, high unemployment, and low school attendance. In 2021, Frederiksen’s Social Democrat-led government rebranded the law, changing “ghettos” to “parallel societies” and “hard ghettos” to “transformational areas,” but the essence of the law remains the same.

When an area is designated a “parallel society” or “transformational area,” authorities gain the power to forcibly relocate residents. In addition, local authorities are obliged to reduce public housing stock by 40 percent in a blatant effort to drive out low-income residents, chiefly immigrants, and open up the area to private investors. Punishments for crimes deemed to have been committed in “parallel societies” or “transformational areas” can be doubled compared to usual penalties.

The European Court of Justice has a pending ruling on the Danish law, which has been challenged as racist and a violation of basic human rights. Earlier this year, an ECJ advocate general issued a non-binding opinion that “the division between ‘Western’ and ‘non-Western’ immigrants and their descendants is based on ethnic origin.” This constitutes direct discrimination, the ruling found.

The Social Democrats join in anti-immigrant crackdowns at every opportunity. In September, Frederiksen’s government amplified a vicious witch-hunt against university students from Bangladesh and Nepal, who were accused of abusing student visas by taking their families to Denmark during their studies and working alongside their studies to meet living costs. DF in particular waged a campaign demanding that the international students be flown out of the country. Frederiksen’s coalition government responded by abrogating the right of students from the two countries concerned to bring relatives to Denmark and tightening surveillance of international student activities on- and off-campus.

The persecution of immigrants by the Social Democrats is one element in the party’s sharp shift to the right, expressed also in its backing for a major rearmament programme and austerity for public services to fund militarism and war. This course has seen the popularity of the Social Democrats, long Denmark’s largest party, plummet. In last month’s municipal elections, the Social Democrats experienced their worst result in decades, even losing control of the stronghold of Copenhagen for the first time in a century. The latest opinion poll puts the party at just 17.5 percent. Calls are growing for Frederiksen’s replacement as party leader.

But Frederiksen’s ouster would change nothing. She has been able to govern for the past six years due to the support of the entire political establishment for her right-wing policies on all essential points. During her first three years in power, Frederiksen depended in parliament on the votes of the so-called “left” Socialist People’s Party (SF) and Red-Green Alliance/Unity List (RGA) for a majority. This was the period of the rebranding of Denmark’s “ghetto law” to make its discriminatory powers more palatable, as well as Copenhagen’s firm backing for the US/NATO-led war with Russia.

SF, whose roots lie in a split from the Stalinist Danish Communist Party in the wake of the suppression of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, joined a broad consensus of right-wing and “left” parties that agreed in the spring of 2022 to increase military spending to 2 percent of GDP by 2033, a goal that has since been revised. Although the RGA—a coalition of ex-Stalinist and other anti-Trotskyist groups established in the late 1980s for electoral purposes—chose for tactical reasons not to sign this agreement, it ensured its implementation by continuing to vote with Frederiksen’s Social Democrat minority government until the parliamentary elections in November 2022.

For the past three years, Frederiksen’s Social Democrats have governed in an alliance with the right-wing Liberals and the Moderates, a creation of former Liberal Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen. The coalition marked the first time in over four decades that the Social Democrats, a party from Denmark’s “red block,” had governed together with right-wing parties, which have traditionally been organised in the “blue block.”

This shift symbolises not only the Social Democrats’ embrace of the far right’s anti-immigrant programme, but also unrestrained warmongering against Russia and cost-cutting for public services and social programmes. The coalition has undertaken a massive expansion of military spending, including the purchase of an additional 16 F-35 fighter jets and other military equipment to step up Denmark’s presence in the Arctic under conditions of mounting great power conflicts. It has also eliminated a public holiday and imposed other attacks on workers to fund its ever-growing war budgets.

These developments underscore how the fight to defend the rights of immigrants, who are a key component of the working class across Europe, is inseparable from the struggle to mobilise the working class continent-wide against militarism and war, and the attacks on wages, public services, and jobs imposed by the ruling elites.

Workers in Denmark, Italy, and throughout Europe disgusted by the sharp shift to the right of official politics and the witch-hunt against immigrants, which recalls nothing so much as the rabid antisemitism of the Nazis and other fascist regimes of the 1930s, must take this struggle forward on the basis of a socialist and internationalist programme.



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