European governments demand crackdown on migrants after 99 die trying to reach Spain

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At least 99 people died Thursday and Friday during desperate attempts by tens of thousands of people attempting to swim from Morocco to the Spanish exclave of Ceuta in North Africa, and over 100 remain missing. Over 60,000 reached their destination during a 24-hour period, during which they were met with brutal violence by the Spanish military and a concerted campaign to force their return to poverty-stricken Morocco. The political establishment and media outlets across Europe erupted with furious denunciations of "invaders," as they churned out far-right talking points about the "hybrid threat" posed by migrants attacking Europe.

The trigger for the mass incursion appears to have been a Spanish Supreme Court ruling that prohibited the authorities from immediately deporting refugees if they are intercepted at sea while trying to reach Spanish territory. But Spain's Socialist Party-led government, no less than far-right governments led by the likes of Meloni in Italy and Trump in the US, has no time for such legal niceties. Echoing Trump's self-serving propaganda that Europe was experiencing an "invasion," Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez denounced the migrants for having launched an "attack on Spain's territorial integrity" and dispatched the military to Ceuta.

Sanchez used exactly the same language in June 2022, when his government oversaw a bloody massacre of 37 refugees carried out by the Spanish civil guard and Moroccan gendarmerie on the border with Melilla, the second Spanish exclave in north Africa. His government, which included the pseudo-left Podemos at the time of the 2022 massacre, has been an integral part of the European ruling elite's resurrection of state-organised violence against migrants not seen in Europe since the fascist dictatorships of the 1930s and 1940s. Sumar, which split from Podemos to continue in power after the latter left Sanchez's government in December 2023, joined in the anti-immigrant agitation by blaming Morocco for allowing the migrants into Ceuta and sending a letter to the UN demanding that it investigate Morocco's involvement.

Working with the police, soldiers quickly rounded up the migrants in Ceuta and dispatched them back to Morocco so that by Sunday, government officials could claim that virtually everyone had been returned, without so much as a legal hearing. One man told Germany's Tagesschau news programme that he was even prohibited from entering a supermarket to buy food, because the authorities arbitrarily decided to establish passport controls at the entrance.

The cruel brutality on display towards desperate people seeking to flee social and economic misery and political persecution is the result of the Fortress Europe policy enforced by all of the continent's governments, whether they consist of conservative, social democratic or pseudo-left parties. The European Union has effectively abolished the right to asylum for those seeking to enter the continent by building external borders patrolled by heavily armed guards that even the fascist Trump would be proud of. As a consequence, over 32,000 refugees and migrants have been recorded as dead or missing while trying to cross the Mediterranean to Europe since 2014, according to the Missing Migrants Project.

Just days before the storming of Ceuta, over 140 migrants from West Africa were found dead on a boat off the coast of Mauritania in a horrifying incident that went almost unreported in the European media. The vessel set sail from Guinea, over 2,000 kilometres (1,243 miles) from Spain, but ran out of fuel and food for passengers on the way. Gruelling routes through the Atlantic have increased in popularity since Spain and the EU shut down the option of reaching the continent through the Canary Islands.

Europe's far right has seized on the events in Ceuta to escalate fascist anti-immigrant propaganda, while the political establishment across the continent is going out of its way to integrate these narratives even more into mainstream discourse. Italy's prime minister, the Mussolini-admirer Giorgia Meloni, announced the suspension of the Schengen Agreement with Spain for a month, which halts passport-free travel between the two countries.

Governments from 22 of the EU's 27 member states demanded an emergency meeting of interior ministers for Tuesday in a letter to EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.

The letter assumed the tone of a military force preparing for war. It referred in hysterical terms to "hybrid threats to create the perception that illegal entry into the European Union is possible" and that the current state of affairs "would encourage further attempts, undermine confidence in our common

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migration policy and have repercussions for all member states."

Germany's conservative Chancellor Friedrich Merz, whose government enforces policies towards refugees advocated by the far-right Alternative for Germany, demanded that Morocco "take back illegal migrants immediately." Denmark's Mette Frederiksen, a Social Democrat who governs with the support of the ex-Stalinist Socialist People's Party and pseudo-left Red-Green Alliance, urged her colleagues to "consider all options, including a suspension of Schengen co-operation," even though Ceuta and Melilla are not part of the Schengen zone.

Sanchez responded by blaming the events in Ceuta on "people smugglers." But the fact of the matter is that the scenes of desperation in North Africa can only occur because the EU has blocked off all legal routes into the continent. The real criminals sit in government offices in Brussels, Berlin, Paris, Rome and Madrid, because their contempt for basic democratic rights, and their funding for authoritarian regimes in Africa to keep migrants out, create the social misery that forces people to take desperate measures. Their policies are no better than those of the fascist Trump, whose ICE thugs stalk the streets of American cities to seize immigrants, whether or not they have the legal entitlement to remain in the US, and routinely use deadly force against their victims.

The Libyan coast guard and blood-drenched military dictatorship in Egypt both receive billions in EU funds to carry out what is euphemistically referred to as "pullbacks" of migrants seeking to reach Europe. This process includes the creation of concentration camp-style facilities where torture and slave-like conditions have been exposed, and "desert dumps," where the EU's bought-and-paid-for thugs simply abandon groups of starving migrants in the Sahara Desert. Some 800 people were even returned by Egypt to Sudan during a three-month period from January to March 2024 amid the civil war raging in that country, according to an Amnesty International report.

In this way, European imperialism works to strengthen "partners" in Africa with whom its banks, corporations and financial oligarchs can intensify the brutal neocolonial plundering of the continent. Egyptian dictator Abdel Fattah al-Sissi, who rose to power in a 2013 coup during which he massacred thousands of political opponents, regularly enjoys the red-carpet treatment in Berlin and other European capitals. In exchange, Cairo has concluded highly profitable contracts for Europe's major capitalist outfits that will keep cash flowing into the pockets of their wealthy shareholders, such as the $8.1 billion contract struck with Siemens to build a 2,000-kilometre (1,273-mile) high-speed rail network, and another $8 billion deal to build three natural gas power plants and wind farms.

Further south, the EU is determined to gain the upper hand through deals with the Democratic Republic of Congo, Zambia, Angola and other countries to open up the exploitation of cobalt and other critical minerals necessary for its "clean energy" transition. It aims to ensure that European imperialism, not its rivals in the US or China, seizes the lion's share of resources for key industries of capitalist "growth," like EV production, renewable energy, AI data centres, and hi-tech manufacturing of digital equipment. Workers labouring in the mines, processing facilities, transportation and other sectors in these countries, which are among the poorest in the world, have no rights and earn a pittance. The average wage in the DRC, for instance, amounts to $142 per month, with many millions living off of much less.

At home, the European powers' demonisation of refugees and immigrants serves to divert popular anger from the real culprits for the deepening social and economic crisis confronting millions of workers. Social life in Europe is not under "attack" by "invading" immigrants, but by a financial oligarchy that demands unchecked power to accumulate wealth and wage wars of aggression to capture natural resources, cheap labour, markets, and geostrategic influence, whether against Russia in Ukraine or Iran in the Middle East.

Europe's oligarchy dictates the vicious austerity programmes being implemented by governments in every European country to pay for rearmament, imperialist war and their own enrichment by gutting public services and imposing job cuts. To enforce this agenda, the ruling class must cultivate far-right and outright fascist forces to intimidate broad popular opposition.

Opposition to war, austerity and the persecution of immigrants and refugees can only be led by the working class. It is the sole social force capable of securing the right of all to live and work in the country of their choice, with full democratic rights. Workers across Europe must come to the defence of all immigrants, who are not infrequently among the most exploited sections of the working class.

This struggle must be directed both against the parties of the right and far right, as well as those of the official "left," all of whom defend European capitalism and its vicious persecution of immigrants and refugees. To conduct this fight, workers across Europe must be mobilised on the basis of a socialist and internationalist programme. Accomplishing this task demands the building of sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International across the continent to provide the necessary revolutionary leadership.

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