

# Left- Horizons

## Defend the Free movement of people

**According to the United Nations, “every minute, 20 people leave everything behind to escape war, persecution or terror.” That means that on World Refugee Day this week (June 20) an additional 29,000 people will have been displaced by political, social or economic crisis – although even this may be an *under-estimate*, since other aid organisations give larger numbers. Last year, another 16 million were added to the total of displaced persons, now numbering a staggering 69 million across the globe, more than the entire population of the UK. Many of these have been refugees for years, in some cases decades, and have been displaced several times.**

According to *The Guardian* on World Refugee Day, more than 34,000 refugees have died in the last few years, mostly by drowning, in a desperate attempt to reach Europe from North Africa. The commentators in the gutter-press offer nothing but disparaging and insulting remarks about these migrants, but to workers, that awful statistic is a measure of how desperate these migrants must be. As every normal person would testify, no-one in their right mind would ever put their children and families in a crowded rubber boat, to cross a dangerous open sea, unless there were really serious reasons why their former life had become so utterly unbearable.

Although World Refugee Day is supposed to honour the “courage and strength” of refugees, in reality it does nothing whatsoever to tackle or even explain the root causes of such a massive enforced shift of populations. Even the greater awareness generated from the extra publicity on that one day is

only a momentary improvement on the normal indifference or hostility of the mainstream media. What was mostly missing on this one special day was any explanation for the huge surge of refugees in recent years. We have to say loud and clear that the global refugee crisis is not a result of ‘natural’ disasters or unforeseen catastrophes, but a result of crises that were *engineered* by government decisions, by acts of war, repression and genocide. Few things more starkly illustrate the decay and disintegration of the world capitalist system than the millions of people forced to flee from their homes for their own safety and well-being.

The sight of the refugees flooding into Europe has generated a positive mountain of hypocrisy among politicians. Very often the same MPs and representatives who wring their hands today at the plight of this tide of humanity, were the same people who yesterday put up their hands to vote for the bombing of Libya or the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan.

### Massive movement of desperate peoples

The large numbers of refugees from North Africa, Iraq and Syria are a direct result of American, British and French policy in devastating these regions and opening the doors to sectarian conflict and civil war. As it has been explained in other articles on our website, the consistent policy of the USA in Latin America over many decades has been to forcibly deny the democratic rights of these smaller nations to develop their economies and society. It is as a result of this permanent ‘strangulation’ by US business and political interests that that poverty, crime, corruption and fear are endemic, and this in turn leads to a rush of refugees to the north.

This massive and ongoing movement of desperate people has had a significant effect on politics in Europe and North America. It has had some bearing on every election and referendum in

Europe and the USA in the last four years. In the Brexit referendum, the election of Trump, the French presidential election, the German general election, in the Polish, Hungarian and most recently in the Italian elections, the issue of immigration and migrants has played a significant role.

The British EU referendum was entirely dominated by the xenophobic campaign of UKIP and the Tory right, demanding “control” of British borders. In Germany, the AfD (*Alternative for Germany*) Party made significant gains in the general election, specifically around the question of migrants and the decades-old accord between the Bavarian Christian Social Union and Merkel’s Christian Democrats looks like foundering on the same issue. In Italy, the supposed ‘junior’ partner of the new coalition, the League, is making all the political running, again around the issue of migrants.

## Camps opening up again in Europe

Largely under the radar of the mainstream press, the camps are opening up again in Europe, on a scale not witnessed for generations. Poland and Hungary already have ‘transit’ camps for ‘illegal’ immigrants. Bavaria in southern Germany has taken to keeping migrants in ‘holding centres’ miles away from urban centres and now plans to build 40 more. In Italy, the League/5-Star coalition has pledged to expel half a million ‘illegals’ and has promised to build camps to hold them. None of these, appalling though they are, matched the special camps for children of ‘illegals’ set up by the Trump administration.

This movement of millions of desperate people into Europe and the USA has thus allowed the right-wing parties to blame migrants for all the social ills facing working class people. Faced with apparently endless austerity, insecurity and uncertainty, demagogic politicians have pointed the finger at migrants. These movements are all an echo – at this stage muted and not irreversible – of the policies of fascism in the interwar period. But they are also a warning of much more vicious and dangerous movements that are possible in the future.

But it is important to add that ***the political field has only been left open to the right on this issue because the so-called ‘left’ political leaders have largely abandoned the battle.*** They have overwhelmingly failed to take on the racists and xenophobes and instead of facing them head-on, have accepted the fundamental premise of their policy on migration.

It is the duty of the labour and trade union leaders challenge the right wing on this issue, toe-to-toe as it were. ***It is not immigrants and refugees who cause austerity.*** Labour’s election manifesto of 2017 some way to putting forward this argument. “Labour will not scapegoat migrants”, it said, “nor blame them for economic failures.” Similarly, it defended the rights of workers to maintain their wages and working conditions and not have them undercut by the use of cheaper labour. But it also leans clearly towards the idea of immigration controls, “based on our economic needs, balancing controls and existing entitlements...”

## No border controls for the rich

For socialists, the whole question of migration and the rights of citizenship and residency are not *national* issues but *class* questions. There has never been any problem of settlement or residency for the rich. Even today, with the Tories operating a strict migration ‘quota’ system, there are different ‘tiers’, depending on the wealth and the proposed salaries of migrants. Earlier this month, for example, it was reported that more than 2,300 doctors who had been offered jobs by the NHS had been refused the right to come to Britain in the previous five months, solely on the grounds that their ‘tier-2’ quota was full. In April, in the same tier only those able to show they would earn more than £50,000 a year were given visas, in other words, no doctors or nurses.

For ‘tier-1’ migrants, of course – the rich and the super-rich – there are no problems. The UK offers “golden visas” to any wealthy individual, including permanent residency rights, if they have a few millions to spare. Moreover, this is a system that is widespread across Europe. Once EU citizenship is acquired, there is free movement across any of the 28 EU states and beyond. This, citizenship costs €65,000 in Latvia, €500,000 in Bulgaria, €250,000 in Greece, €650,000 in Malta and so on. According to the IMF, 800 super-rich individuals have gained EU citizenship through Malta alone. And then there are cheap deals available in the Caribbean, in places like St Kitts and Antigua. “Almost half of the EU’s member states offer some kind of investment residency or citizenship programme leading to a highly prized EU visa-free travel to between 150 and 170 countries.” (*The Guardian*, June 2, 2018)

In the USA, where Donald Trump has been incarcerating little infants, torn from their ‘illegal’ migrant mothers, the super-rich can easily gain entry. The EB-5 programme effectively allows a green card to be purchased by anyone with enough money and the programme is worth \$4bn a year to the Federal coffers. (*The Guardian*).

Socialists must argue for the Labour Party to be in favour of the ***free movement of labour and the free movement of peoples.*** A socialist Labour government, implementing policies in the interests of working class people – for the Many, not the Few – can guarantee all the basic necessities of life: health care, education, jobs and homes. It is only the so-called ‘free’ market – capitalism – that denies these rights to workers today. Under the circumstances of a Labour government, carrying out socialist measures, refugees fleeing wars and terror at home could be welcomed and supported in settlement, without any perceived threat to the security and well-being of other workers. These are the policies and the arguments that the Labour Party must put forward, facing up to the racists and xenophobes throughout the whole year and not only on the one day designated for refugees.

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