

European Union intensifies campaign of terror against refugees

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The European Union summit at the end of last week marked a dangerous turning point in post-World War II European history. The measures targeting refugees adopted in Brussels have exposed the EU for what it is: a reactionary instrument of the ruling classes. The EU is being used by the European governments, their mounting differences notwithstanding, to intensify their policies of militarism, repression and social attacks on the working class. With the Brussels summit, the EU has shifted far to the right, with rabidly nationalist and far-right forces setting the agenda.

The monstrous persecution of immigrants is an international phenomenon. In the United States, the Trump administration is ripping children from their parents and detaining them in cages, while planning a network of military camps to hold 120,000 people. The global character of this war on the most vulnerable and impoverished sections of the international working class demonstrates that it is a product of the mortal crisis of the world capitalist system.

Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz, who governs in Vienna in a coalition with the far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ), took over the EU presidency yesterday. Kurz and the FPÖ are being applauded for their anti-refugee agenda by extreme right and fascist forces across Europe. At the party congress of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) over the weekend, federal party spokesman Jörg Meuthen described Kurz as a fellow combatant on the issue of “Fortress Europe.” The AfD leader said, “Those with whom we want to and must cooperate are Hans-Christian Strache, Sebastian Kurz, Matteo Salvini and Viktor Orbán.”

In Vienna, Kurz underscored that the EU’s refugee policy is essentially that of the far right. He stated through a spokesman that he leads “a clearly pro-European federal government” and is striving for a European-wide solution to the refugee issue. He added that his “allies in Germany” in this are “the German government led by

Chancellor Angela Merkel and Interior Minister Horst Seehofer.” Kurz noted in an interview on Austrian television, “It’s important that what was decided be promptly implemented. We will continue to apply pressure to ensure that happens.”

The proposed measures recall the darkest chapters in European history. They include, among other things, the complete sealing off of “Fortress Europe” and mass deportations to war zones in the Middle East and Africa. The official summit statement agreed to by all of the member states on Friday declared: “The European Council affirms that the member states must ensure effective control of the EU’s external borders with financial and material support to the EU. It notes that the repatriation of irregular migrants must be significantly increased.”

To terrorise refugees, the EU border agency Frontex will add at least 10,000 new personnel by 2020 and be expanded into a de facto military police force. The summit agreed to the establishment of concentration camps in North Africa and within the borders of the EU to hold refugees. In the summit statement, these detention centres were euphemistically referred to as “debarkation platforms” and “control centres” for the “resettlement and new settlement” of refugees. The euphemisms recall those employed by the Nazis to describe their genocidal policies toward Jews, gypsies and other “aliens.”

The EU knows full well that the planned camps in North Africa will be centres of terror and torture, resembling the Nazis’ concentration camps. As the German ambassador to Niger remarked in a 2017 internal diplomatic wire report to the chancellor and various ministries, “[T]he most serious and systematic human rights abuses [are taking place] in Libya.” According to an article in the *Welt am Sonntag*, the document stated that “authentic mobile phone photos and videos prove the concentration camp-like conditions in the so-called private prisons.”

In the Libyan camps, “executions of refugees who cannot pay, torture, rape, blackmail and abandonment in the desert are on the order of the day,” according to the correspondence. “Eyewitnesses spoke of exactly five executions per week in the prison, announced and carried out every Friday to make room for new arrivals, i.e., to increase the human throughput and thereby the operator’s profits.”

The centres already in existence in Greece, which will set the pattern for detention camps throughout the EU, likewise resemble concentration camps. An article in Sunday’s *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung* about the Moria “hotspot” established on the island of Lesbos by the Greek Syriza government reported on a “visit to hell.” The one-hectare fortified area, a former army barracks, houses 7,500 people, who live under catastrophic conditions.

“Barbed wire is stretched out over the fences,” the article observes. “All entries to the camp have watchtowers and guards with guns... Anyone who wants in must show ID. The media in particular is not allowed easy access behind the gates.”

The establishment of such institutions in the major capitalist countries is a serious warning to workers and young people. As under fascist regimes, the concentration camps will be used against political opponents, and ultimately against the working class as a whole.

The EU is preparing for a confrontation with the working class, which is increasingly in rebellion against its militarist and anti-working class policies. Some 100,000 workers and young people protested in Vienna on Saturday against the government’s proposal to introduce a 12-hour workday, increasing the maximum number of working hours allowed per week to 60.

Under the slogan “A Europe that Protects,” the EU presidency currently held by Austria intends to accelerate the erection of a European police state. To this end, it will hold an initial EU summit in Salzburg on 20 September.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International urge workers to establish independent action committees in their workplaces, schools, universities and neighbourhoods to organise protests and strikes against police raids and attacks on immigrants and refugees. The following demands should be raised and discussed as widely as possible:

- The dismantling of detention camps in the Middle East and North Africa, the withdrawal of European and US troops from these regions, and the free and safe

passage of refugees to EU countries of their choice.

- The abolition of the EU’s Frontex border police.
- Non-cooperation with the EU deportation machine and all state policies preparing ethnic cleansing.
- The provision of trillions of euros in public services, training and jobs to all workers, immigrant and native-born alike. The wealth squandered on a decade of EU bank bailouts must be expropriated and used to meet the urgent social needs of the working population.

The development of such committees must be connected to the movement of the international working class to abolish the capitalist, nation-state system. The fact that all governing parties in Europe—from the pseudo-left Syriza to the social democratic PSOE in Spain, Germany’s grand coalition, and the far-right parties in Italy, Austria and Eastern Europe—are cooperating so closely to intensify the terror against refugees underscores the fact that workers confront revolutionary tasks. European capitalism cannot be tamed. It must be overthrown and replaced by the United Socialist States of Europe.

Leon Trotsky noted in the manifesto of the Fourth International, written in the early stages of World War II, that the “task posed by history is not to support one part of the imperialist system against another, but to make an end of the system as a whole.”

This task is posed today with renewed urgency. To prevent a relapse into barbarism and war, the working class must oppose all factions of the capitalist class and consciously take up the fight for a socialist and internationalist programme.

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