

A murderous pact: The European Union to deport refugees

By Peter Schwarz
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The “Asylum and Migration Pact,” which the EU Commission presented on Wednesday, is so cynical and inhumane it is hard to find words to describe it. Wrapped up in sugary phrases about “values,” “responsibility” and “solidarity,” Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has presented a plan that means deportation, misery and certain death for hundreds of thousands.

Günter Burkhardt, the managing director of charity Pro Asyl, called the plan “a diabolical pact of disenfranchisement.” “Driven by right-wing populists, the EU Commission is betraying the right of asylum and the human rights of people seeking protection,” he commented.

Von der Leyen described the pact as a “new beginning” after the dealings with those seeking refuge in Europe from the wars in the Middle East and Africa had repeatedly led to fierce disputes within the EU. “Europe must move away from ad hoc solutions to problems and towards a predictable and reliable system for migration management,” said the EU Commission president.

This “management” is focused on throwing out refugees who have managed to cross the borders of Fortress Europe at the risk of their lives. Elementary principles of the right of asylum and human rights fall by the wayside.

“No refugee quotas, but harsh deportations,” was how news weekly *Der Spiegel* summed up the core of the plan. The pro-Green Party *taz* writes, “Faster registration, faster decisions, faster deportation, if possible already at the external borders—these are the most important innovations proposed by the EU Commission in its ‘Migration and Asylum Pact.’” Migration Commissioner Ylva Johansson, who presented the pact together with von der Leyen, said, “The message is: You will return.”

To achieve this, the plan provides for two main innovations: “screening” procedures and “deportation partnerships.”

In the screening procedure, refugees arriving on European coasts are registered and pre-sorted (“screened”) within five days. Those who come from a country from which less than 20 percent of asylum seekers have been recognised so far are placed in the so-called border procedure and are deported again within 12 weeks.

In practice, this is tantamount to abolishing the right of asylum. During the screening and border procedures, refugees are considered not to have entered the country. They have no access to European courts and cannot appeal against a negative decision. The decision is left to the arbitrary rulings of immigration officials, who are often politically right-wing and subject to the instructions of their government. A fair asylum process is not guaranteed.

To make these screening and border procedures possible, reception camps on the European border will be transformed into huge prisons from which there is no escape. The burnt down Moria camp on Lesbos in Greece, which is currently being rebuilt as a tent city, serves as a pilot project. A “task force” from Brussels is to set up a “model project” on Lesbos, where the Commission’s plans will be the first to be applied. Greece has already agreed to a “joint pilot project,” said von der Leyen.

The new camp Moria is a legal no man’s land. Journalists are denied access, as are lawyers. Inmates are not allowed to leave the camp and must live in indescribable conditions. Water is rationed in bottles; there are no showers. Access to the sea next to the camp is blocked by barbed wire.

The “deportation partnerships,” the second innovation of the EU Pact, are a newly devised, perverse form of “European solidarity.” States which refuse to accept a fixed quota of recognised refugees can buy their freedom and show their “solidarity” by deporting a corresponding

number of non-recognised refugees in exchange.

In future, states would be able to “choose between reception and assistance with deportation,” said Migration Commissioner Johansson. If they fail in deporting the refugees within eight months, for example, because of illness or refusal by the country of origin, they must take them in themselves.

In practice, this means that states like Hungary, which has been the most brutal in dealing with refugees so far, take on the role of security guard and doorkeeper for Fortress Europe. It is easy to imagine what this portends for the refugees concerned—no means will be too barbaric to put them outside the EU. And the EU itself wants to take the lead in this. To this end, an “EU coordinator for repatriations” is to be appointed.

Von der Leyen’s Migration Plan, which has yet to be approved by the EU Parliament and the member states, leaves all the mechanisms in place that have condemned tens of thousands of refugees to face drowning in the Mediterranean, dying of thirst in the Sahara or enslavement by EU-funded human traffickers in recent years. It does not provide for a resumption of sea rescue operations or an end to cooperation with the notorious Libyan coast guard. Instead, the border management agency Frontex is to be further strengthened to seal Europe’s external borders even more hermetically.

In 2019, only 140,000 refugees had managed to apply for asylum in the EU, of whom at best, a third will be recognised. But even this number—one asylum seeker per 1,000 inhabitants—is too much for the EU.

Officially, the “Asylum and Migration Pact” originates from the EU Commission, but the actual authors are based in the Berlin Chancellery and German Interior Ministry. The proposals were agreed upon with Chancellor Angela Merkel, who currently holds the EU presidency. The Commission is thus essentially adopting a concept of the German EU Council Presidency.

Interior Minister Horst Seehofer had already circulated a paper to this effect last November, which was regarded as a kind of roadmap for the German EU Council presidency in the second half of 2020. It advocated “binding preliminary examinations” of asylum applications in detention camps at the EU’s external borders, from where refugees with “unfounded applications” would be directly deported again. The camps should have an extraterritorial character. The EU should participate directly in the preliminary examination and deportation with its own asylum authority and Frontex. These plans are now reflected in the EU paper.

The ruthlessness with which Berlin and Brussels are ignoring elementary fundamental rights and the lives of refugees must be taken as a warning. They are demonstrating the same ruthlessness towards human life in the coronavirus pandemic, where they deliberately accept the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people. Although infection rates are exploding, businesses and schools remain open so as not to jeopardise the profits of the economy and the assets of the rich.

Faced with the deepest crisis of capitalism since the 1930s and growing resistance from the working class and youth, the ruling class everywhere is turning to authoritarian methods of control. Von der Leyen’s “Asylum and Migration Pact” could also have been written in the party headquarters of the Alternative for Germany (AfD), the Italian Lega or the French Rassemblement National. It is implementing everything that these extreme right-wing and neo-fascist organisations have been demanding for years.

The working class must unconditionally defend all refugees and their fundamental right to asylum. Only then can workers defend their own democratic and social rights. This requires the construction of an independent movement of the international working class, which fights for the overthrow of capitalism—the cause of fascism, war and poverty—and for a socialist programme.

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