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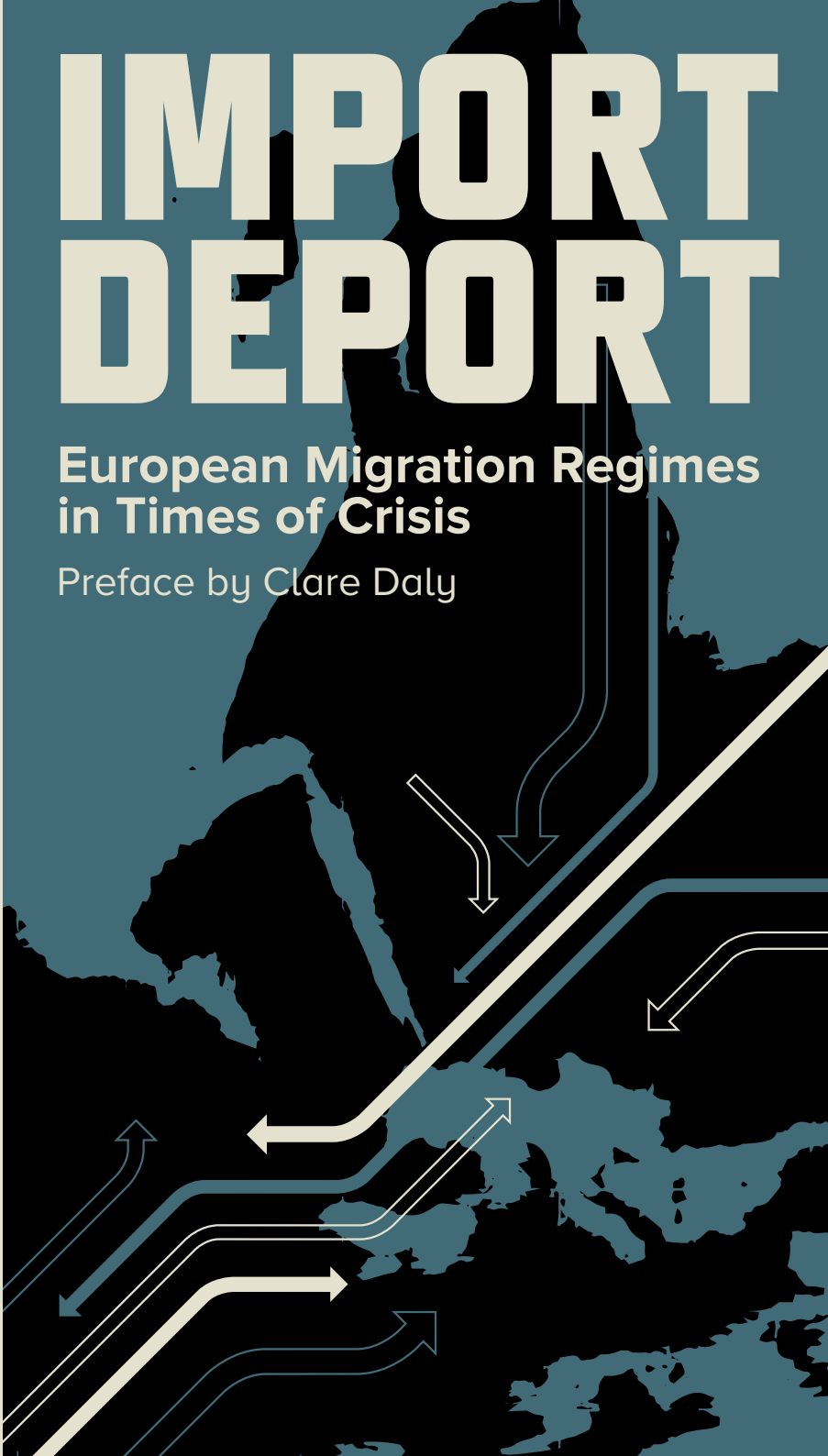
IMPORT DEPORT

European Migration Regimes
in Times of Crisis

Preface by Clare Daly

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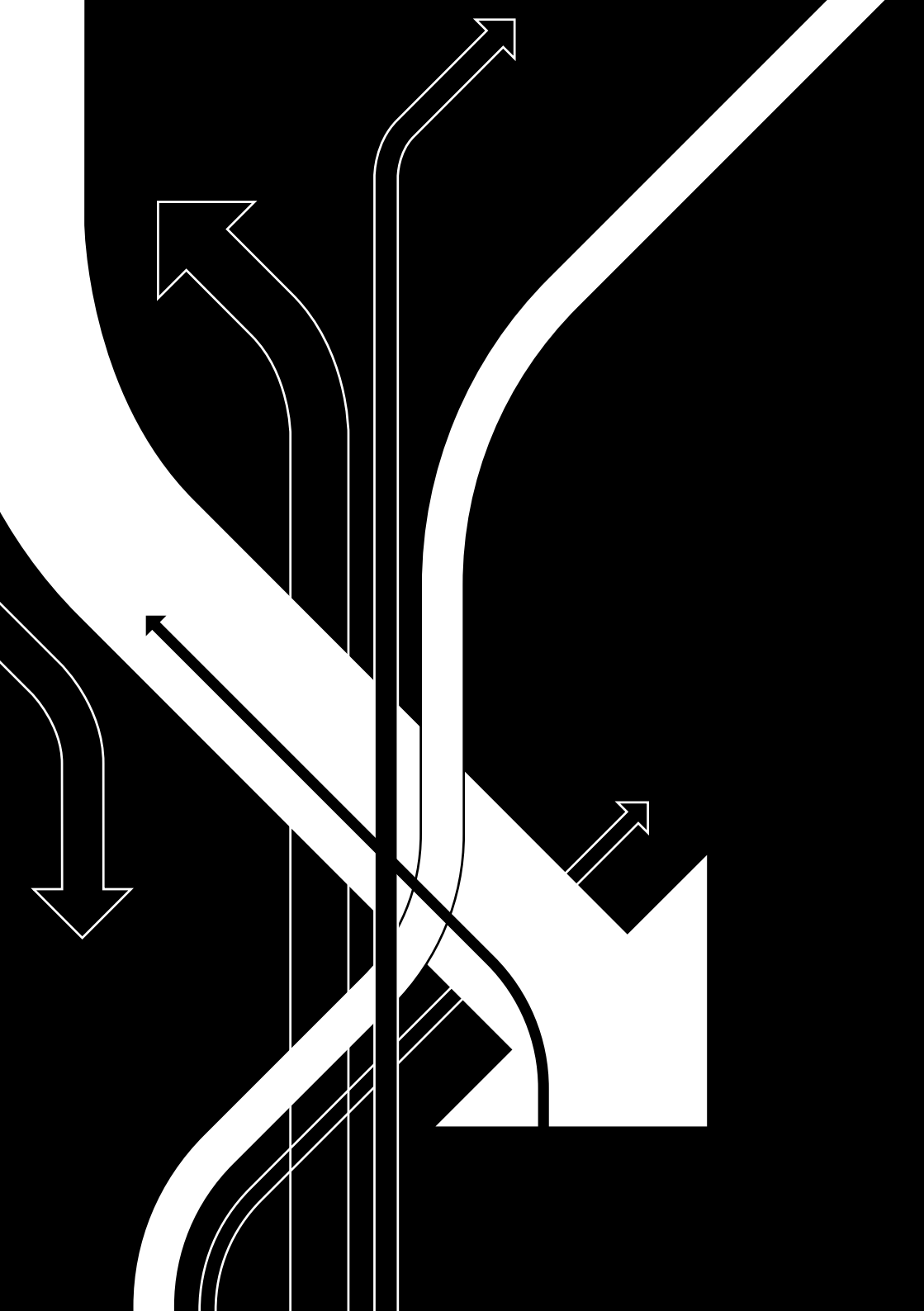


ZETKIN FORUM FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH

A European-based platform encouraging international exchange guided by the principles of internationalism, anti-fascism, social progress, and scientific research



PREFACE	..... 05
<i>by Clare Daly</i>	
INTRODUCTION	..... 07
<i>by Zetkin Forum</i>	
DENMARK	..... 11
<i>A contribution by Annette Jessen (Demos): Human Rights on the Chopping Block</i>	
FRANCE	..... 19
<i>A contribution by Aurélie Dianara (author at Contretemps): A parliamentary theatre to pass the most repressive migration law France has ever seen.</i>	
GERMANY	..... 23
<i>A contribution by Rabab Douwa and Thana Douwa (Migrantifa Rhein-Main): From guest worker policy to freedom-depriving measures against migrants.</i>	
POLAND	..... 31
<i>A contribution by Pawel Wargan (Progressive International): Migration policy as controlled inflow and outflow of labour demand.</i>	
SWITZERLAND	..... 37
<i>A contribution by Andrin Mando (antira.org): From bunkers as accommodation to the normalisation of racist debates – Switzerland as a pioneer of a policy of isolation.</i>	
ITALY	..... 43
<i>A contribution by Abdelouahad El Mir (Movimento Migranti e Rifugiati Napoli - Potere al po-polo): Pushing European borders across the Mediterranean</i>	
UNITED KINGDOM	..... 51
<i>A contribution by Joti Brar (CPGB-ML): ‘Stop the boats!’ The political football of the ‘immigration debate’</i>	
ENDNOTES	..... 57



PREFACE

By Clare Daly

We've all been hearing since at least 2015 about Europe's 'migration crisis'. But Europe doesn't have a migration 'crisis'. What it's had over the past nine years or more is a series of political crises, with 'migration' being used over and over again to deflect and distract from the much deeper problems assailing Europe.

The entire political and media establishment connives to keep migration at the top of the agenda. For example, for months in Ireland, the media and politicians have bombarded the public with non-stop talk about immigration. They tell us, very solemnly and regretfully, that we need to have an 'honest' conversation about migration. We have no choice.

But we all know that the media and political mainstream are extremely good at ignoring things when they want to. You could have 10,000 people on the streets demanding housing for all, and they wouldn't mention it. So why are they so eager to have this conversation?

It's obvious: if you're talking about immigration, then you're not talking about housing, health, or the fact that your state serves the interests of transnational capital and not its citizens. You're obscuring the real reasons that people are poorer, more precarious, and angrier, making it less likely that they will organise to begin to address them.

Britain is a decade ahead of Ireland in this game. They've been consumed by a 'conversation' about migration for ten years or more. Savage austerity was let off the hook. And while the establishment was busy being 'honest' about migration, child poverty skyrocketed – Britain now has the highest child poverty rates of any high-income country in the OECD. British children are now shorter than the EU average because so many of them are malnourished. The housing system is utterly broken, and people are literally hounded to death by a welfare system that hates them. Austerity is now entrenched as a permanent policy. Monies for basic services such as health

care, food support,, and child care have been sacrificed to the military budget. Only the rich are getting richer off the back of it. Yet immigration levels remained unchanged. This ‘conversation’, this ‘crisis’ is a bait and switch. It’s no wonder the political and media mainstream loves it. Meanwhile, in the EU, the new Migration Pact will be a bonanza for the arms and security industry that profits so handsomely from the wars and instability that cause people to leave their homes in the first place. It won’t stop migration, but it will kill more people who have no choice but to leave where they are to try and find safety and security for themselves and their families. Those who support this deal know this and have knowingly signed off on a deal that will kill many, many people, including children. They’ve signed off on a deal that will imprison children and lock up families.. They’ve signed off on a deal that will see yet another massive transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich. More public money going straight into the pockets of the defence and arms industries. Yet another payday for their wealthy shareholders. Despite the struggling economies of the EU, particularly for working people, more billions will be spent on walls and drones and spy tech, on contractors and consultants and border guards, on all the expensive and deadly trappings of pushback, detention, and surveillance. Billions will be taken from the things we need – housing, health, education, childcare, all while savaging human rights.

INTRODUCTION

‘Every industrial and commercial centre in England now possesses a working class divided into two hostile camps, English proletarians and Irish proletarians. The ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who lowers his standard of life. In relation to the Irish worker, he regards himself as a member of the ruling nation, and, consequently, he becomes a tool of the English aristocrats and capitalists against Ireland, thus strengthening their domination over himself. He cherishes religious, social, and national prejudices against the Irish worker. His attitude towards him is much the same as that of the “poor whites” to the Negroes in the former slave states of the U.S.A.. The Irishman pays him back with interest in his own money. He sees in the English worker both the accomplice and the stupid tool of the English rulers in Ireland.’

– Karl Marx (1870)

Few subjects elicit as much frenzied media attention as migration, not because of the wars, poverty, and hunger that force millions of people to leave their homes and not the more than 3,000 people who drowned in the Mediterranean in 2023 trying to escape their poverty, starvation, and destitution. Instead, we are overwhelmed with hot-headed debates on the ‘drain’ on the social systems, the criminal foreigner, the extremist Muslim, the victimised uneducated woman, the threat to Western culture, etc. For years, hysterical talk shows about refugees and migration have been on repeat, especially in pre-election periods. And, since 2015, when these polemics became more frenzied and feverish, broader sections of Europe’s population are buying into these racist narratives. Right-wing pundits ignite them over and over again, further penetrating ever deeper into the broader public sphere.

It is within this context that many laws have been passed to accelerate the deportation of refugees and limit migration in many European countries. Whether from the government or opposition and regardless of their political affiliation, parties and media outlets are engaging in a race to outdo each

other with racist proposals: deportation prisons at Europe's external borders, deals with Rwanda to take in people seeking protection, or arming the police and intelligence agencies to combat so-called 'irregular' migration.

These laws and debates have little to do with understanding the background of today's migration or the actual facts and figures. It is the laws, also the focus of this brochure, that turn migrants and refugees into criminals. They do not end migration.

Whether in search of fertile land and food or fleeing from devastating natural disasters or violent conflicts – migration movements have always been part of human history. The development and rise of the capitalist system of production from more than 600 years ago was based on the subjugation of first Africa and then the Americas, where the slave trade and slavery, lasting more than 400 years, as well as the genocide of millions of Indigenous peoples provided the accumulation of capital to rapidly grow and expand production. As stated in “Hyper-Imperialism: A Dangerous Decadent New Stage”, published by Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research:

“Economic analysis shows that the real rise in capitalist investment in the UK began when slavery’s profits and plunder of countries such as India enabled the historic rise in fixed capital investment and was decisive in so-called capitalist primitive accumulation and the financing of the ‘industrial revolution’. In a 2022 study, Utsa Patnaik indicated that the UK extracted US\$ 45 trillion (using a compound interest rate formula since it remains unrepaid) from India between 1765 and 1936. The overwhelming bulk of leading UK institutions profited from the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The racial ideological underpinning, in turn, has shaped the later development of both capitalism and imperialism.”²¹

As capitalism became the prevalent world economic system, agricultural workers came to the cities to find work, and migration became an inherent mass phenomenon, a necessary component of the market economy. The gap in economic development that colonial and imperialist plunder has only vastly widened constitutes the main prerequisite for migration. Forced debt and austerity programs by the IMF are to the day crushing national economies, prolonging dependencies, and thus drive migration. In other

words, as long as poverty, hunger, unemployment, but also wars and environmental devastation threaten large parts of humanity, neither laws nor fences, no matter how high, will prevent people from migrating in search of better living conditions. No one leaves their home, their family 'voluntarily'. The imperialist order has structurally incorporated the kind of violence that was used to ship the millions of slaves to the metropolises of economic development. The demand for cheap labour creates continuous violence.

There are estimated 281 million migrants worldwide, who account for 3.6% of the world's population. In 1900 migrants made up a similar 3% relative to the world's population.² Work, family, and study are by far the most important reasons for migration. However much of public outcry circles around refugees. By the end of 2022, there was a total of 35.3 million refugees globally, 41% of them under the age of 18 years. 87% of refugees under UNHCR mandate came from only ten countries.³ 70% of refugees were hosted in countries neighbouring their countries of origin. These few numbers already counter many of the hypocritical talking points.

Entire economic sectors in the leading Western European countries depend on the influx of cheap foreign labour. Whether in nursing and other healthcare occupations, seasonal agricultural workers, meat processing, construction, catering or delivery services, foreign workers often keep the businesses running. When domestic workers are no longer willing to accept salaries and working conditions, economic pressure and political persecution ensure that migrants still fill every vacancy. The influx of foreign workers from the economic periphery to the imperialist core perpetuates unequal development and even increases it. Trained specialists as well as labour potential are being withdrawn from the global South. Instead of economic development, the profit motives of leading monopolies seek to maintain their dominant position through the permanent relative and absolute underdevelopment of large parts of the world.

What is the political rationale behind criminalizing migration since capitalism always needs a surplus labour force?

Especially during election campaigns, as Claire Daily points out in the preface, the issue of migration serves as a well-calculated distraction from burning social and political problems, their causes, and those responsible.

Demagogic narratives are adopted from other political forces supposedly to contest the voter base of right-wing parties.

The public debate differentiates between ‘regular’ and ‘irregular’ migration or well-educated foreign skilled workers and those who would supposedly be a drain on the state. This division is instrumental in inciting the first generation of migrants against every future generation, while simultaneously obstructing their participation in labour disputes and trade unions. It is the illegalisation of migrants and their social defamation that create the pressure to accept any job, no matter how bad and poorly paid. The struggle for equal rights for all people living in the country is a crucial prerequisite for democratic developments and political struggles and thus belongs in the foundations of any progressive organisation.

Fuelling the flames of racism and national chauvinism prepares the special breeding ground in times of war mobilisation, as we are currently experiencing in Europe. In this context, incitement against migrants or in contrast a welcoming narrative are both closely linked to the aggressive foreign policy of European countries that need a scapegoat to forge national fronts and foreign enemies. Treaties between European states and African countries to dry up central migration routes are driving regional military conflicts and chaos, while at the same time securing the political hold of European countries. This instance is partly highlighted in the contribution from Italy. In this brochure, we have combined insight into the developments and discussions from Denmark, Great Britain, France, Germany, Poland, Switzerland, and Italy to provide an exposé of Europe’s repressive migration policy and continued racist migration debate.

DENMARK

HUMAN RIGHTS ON THE CHOPPING BLOCK

By Aurélie Dianara

Denmark's refugee and migration policy is harsher than in other EU states governed by social democratic parties. This is celebrated by some as 'the Danish model' and slammed by others as an attempt at populist politics. Instead of showing solidarity with foreign workers, instead of being a bulwark against repressive migration policies and racist rhetoric, the *Socialdemokratiet* party is cultivating this discourse.

Since the last general election in 2022, Denmark has been led by a coalition government of two liberal-conservative parties and the Social Democrats, who hold the Prime Minister's office. The Social Democrats emerged from the elections as the strongest party and decided to form a government together with conservative parties, not with the left-wing, which was an option. This allowed the Social Democrat-led government to continue the draconian refugee and migration policy that has characterised Denmark in recent years. What are the historical roots of this development?

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Denmark was the first country in the world to ratify the UN Refugee Convention in 1952. The convention came into being after the Second World War with the purpose of guaranteeing all refugees general human rights as formulated by the United Nations Charter in 1948. In 1983, Denmark then passed a very progressive immigration law, making it a pioneering country in terms of human rights and humanistic ideals.

In the 1960s, Denmark, like other European countries, experienced an industrial boom. When the demand for workers could no longer be met by women entering the labour market, workers were recruited from Turkey and Pakistan. As in Germany, they were treated exclusively as human resources and not as fellow citizens. By the mid-1980s, racist and nationalist groups began to criticize Danish refugee and immigration policy, including

regulations on family reunification. The largest immigrant groups came from Turkey and Pakistan, which meant that Muslim culture and lifestyle gradually became part of public life in Denmark. This was the beginning of a specific anti-Muslim racism.

Den Danske Forening (the Danish Association) was founded in 1987 with the objective of initiating a debate on culture and values – a debate that would ultimately lead to a halt on both immigration and the admittance of refugees and ultimately lead to the deportation of foreigners. Danish culture was portrayed as antithetical to the culture of others – especially Muslims. The protagonists were mainly intellectuals who consciously distanced themselves from the street racists of the neo-Nazi groups. Some of the leading figures in the Danish Association would later be the co-founders of the *Dansk Folkeparti* (DF, ‘Danish People’s Party’). They took on leading positions in the DF and sat in parliament for many years. For over a decade, the political debate had been driven to the right so that racist and anti-Muslim rhetoric had become acceptable and normal before the DF even entered parliament.

There is no doubt that the right-wing populist and xenophobic DF played a crucial role in furthering this development. Founded in 1995, the party participated in the 1998 elections and received 7.4% of the vote thus securing 13 seats in parliament.

When the liberal-conservative government under Anders Fogh Rasmussen (who would later become NATO Secretary General) came to power in 2001, the DF gained real influence over immigration legislation. Very quickly, legislation on refugees, migration, family reunification, residence permits, and citizenship was tightened. Terrorism laws were also tightened – with a particular focus on the Middle Eastern people, Muslims in particular, leading to ever more surveillance and harsher penalties for minor infractions. After the attack on the Twin Towers in New York in 2001 and Denmark’s active participation in the US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as the cartoon crisis in 2005⁴, the debate on culture and values became more heated. There was an increasing portrayal of the West as being in conflict with Muslim culture, which was seen as inferior and harmful to society.

At the opening debate of the Danish parliament on 2 October 2001, the then leader of the DF, Pia Kjaersgaard, said: ‘It was mentioned that September 11

was an instance of a clash between civilisations. I do not agree with that. Because a clash between civilisations would presuppose that two civilisations are involved, and that is not the case. There is only one civilisation and that is ours.' Twenty years later, on 18 May 2020, she wrote in the newspaper *Information*: 'Would we be ... a richer, better-functioning, and safer society without these foreigners from non-Western countries? The obvious answer is: Yes!'

In the last 40 years, since the 1980s, the pressure on citizens of non-Danish origin, especially from Muslim countries, has steadily increased. Whether you have just settled in the country or have lived here for generations is, at this point, irrelevant. You are considered *per se* to be non-Western, unfit for integration, undesirable. The long-term strategy of labelling a certain subsection of the population as harmful and undesirable has paid off. This attitude has become mainstream – in public debate, in parliament, and not least in legislation.

After decades of lobbying by the far-right, Denmark has passed the most restrictive refugee laws in Europe. The most recent legislation, passed in 2019, brought about a significant change in the way refugees are treated. The previous focus on integrating refugees into Danish society has now been shifted to a repatriation agenda.

In general, all refugees and reunited family members are only granted temporary protection under the new law. Immigration authorities must, therefore, primarily consider a refugee's protection needs in relation to the security situation in the country of origin and Denmark's international obligations when deciding on residence permits. This led to Denmark's first repatriation law, which was enforced in the spring of 2021, when 453 Syrian refugees with temporary protection and family reunification status had their residence permits revoked or refused renewal, citing the supposedly improved security situation in the Damascus area. Denmark and Hungary were the only countries to consider the situation in Syria safe enough in certain areas to send some refugees back. This happened despite international protests.

FROM INTEGRATION TO DETERRENCE

Danish refugee policy is a political tool to enforce economic interests and the desire for flexibility in the labour market: the ability to satisfy the need for unskilled and skilled foreign workers. The Danish refugee legislation is a political attempt at creating a system that keeps the ground shifting for people coming into the country to keep refugees and migrants in a constant precarious and insecure status. Thus, in recent decades, successive governments have explicitly worked to reduce the number of people seeking asylum in Denmark. The goal is 'zero asylum seekers', as Minister of State Mette Frederiksen declared in the Danish Parliament on 22 January 2021, with the number of asylum seekers at that time amounting to only 1,547 – the lowest number since 1998. In 2022, 31,400 Ukrainians were granted a temporary residence permit in Denmark under a special law. This reveals, above all, the different status quo and the racism that is also used to divide migrants into 'Western' and non-Western (mainly Muslim) groups. Muslim migrants are portrayed as being unable to integrate.

In 2016, the previous Danish government introduced the so-called Jewellery Law. This means that asylum seekers who have assets, such as jewellery, can have them confiscated to pay for their stay in Denmark. The law received a lot of international attention and criticism, as protection cannot normally be bought. According to the Ministry of Immigration and Integration, the Jewellery Act has led to the confiscation of assets in 30 cases in the period from 5 February 2016 to 19 May 2022.

Another deterrent policy is so-called externalisation. In 2019, the social democrats presented plans to set up a reception centre for asylum seekers in Rwanda. A reception centre in a country outside Europe was supposed to stop the flow of refugees and migrants. Asylum seekers would not only have their cases processed in the foreign reception centre but would also stay there if they were granted asylum. The proposal was seen by many as completely unrealistic. However, the government actually had a framework agreement drawn up in which Rwanda agreed to accept asylum seekers from Denmark.

The plan has now been put on hold for the time being. The government is waiting for the mood in the EU to move closer to Danish views. Integration Minister Kaare Dybvad Bek told *Altinget* on January 23, 2023: '.... There is

movement in many European countries. Many are starting to play a very tough political game to push through a stricter asylum policy in Europe. There is a wide range of countries calling for a much more far-reaching solution to the asylum problem.

There are also plans to externalise foreigners from third countries who have been sentenced to deportation. In 2022, an agreement was signed with Kosovo to rent 300 detention places in the Gjilan prison. The Danish Institute for Human Rights described the plan to transfer prisoners to Kosovo as contrary to international law, as the new Balkan republic is not bound by UN conventions or the European Convention on Human Rights.

DENMARK FIRST

Denmark is not only restricting refugee policies. Legislation regarding non-Danish citizens in general has also been tightened year after year. This is evident in the naturalisation process or in the application for permanent residency. Here the requirements for work, language skills, and knowledge of Denmark are very high. The intention is clear: to limit the number of foreigners in Denmark. When citizenship is granted, the country of origin of the people who are granted it must be determined annually. They are divided into categories: Nordic countries, Western countries, non-Western countries, and MENAPT (Middle East, North Africa, Pakistan, and Turkey). Consideration is being given to limiting the granting of citizenship if 25% of applicants come from countries outside Europe.

Pia Kjærsgaard is calling for a complete stop to immigration from these countries: 'Immigrants and descendants from the MENAPT countries are a huge burden on the Danish welfare system. They cost a lot of money through passive social welfare and crime. And we haven't even taken into account the cultural challenge posed by Islamisation. The conclusion is, therefore, quite simple: Denmark must limit the influx of people from these countries as much as possible. A ban on immigration from the MENAPT countries should be a matter of course.' (avisendanmark, 18.12.2021).

In 2018, the first initiatives were introduced against so-called ghetto areas, i.e., neighbourhoods that are considered particularly problematic due to the residents' 'composition'. The criteria for this categorisation are the number of foreigners from non-Western countries, criminals, the unemployed, and

welfare recipients. Each year, lists are published of neighbourhoods that are classified as parallel communities and for which measures must be taken to solve the problem. The focus on residents from non-Western countries has led to criticism, both domestically and internationally. Even the term ‘non-Western’ as one of the criteria shows the ethnic (and therefore racist and discriminatory) classification of the resident group.

Nevertheless, there are politicians who have highlighted Danish migration and immigration policy as exemplary. On 7 January 2024, Integration Minister Kaare Dybvad Bek was invited as keynote speaker to the annual congress of the German Christian Social Union (CSU) in Bavaria. The Danish minister was to speak about the challenges of irregular migration and the Danish government’s proposal for new solutions to create a more ‘humane’ European asylum system.

On the far-right wing of Germany, Denmark is being praised. René Springer, Member of Parliament for Alternative for Germany (AfD), wrote on their website on 27 December 2021: ‘... we have been calling for years for immigration to be controlled and limited and for benefits in kind instead of cash benefits for asylum seekers. Germany must not become an Eldorado for poor migrants seeking transfer payments. The Danish government is obviously fully in line with the AfD here. We can only appeal to the German government to overcome its ideology-driven policy of open borders and follow Denmark’s stricter course on migration policy’. The conservative Swedish government has also described the Danish asylum policy as ‘impressive’.

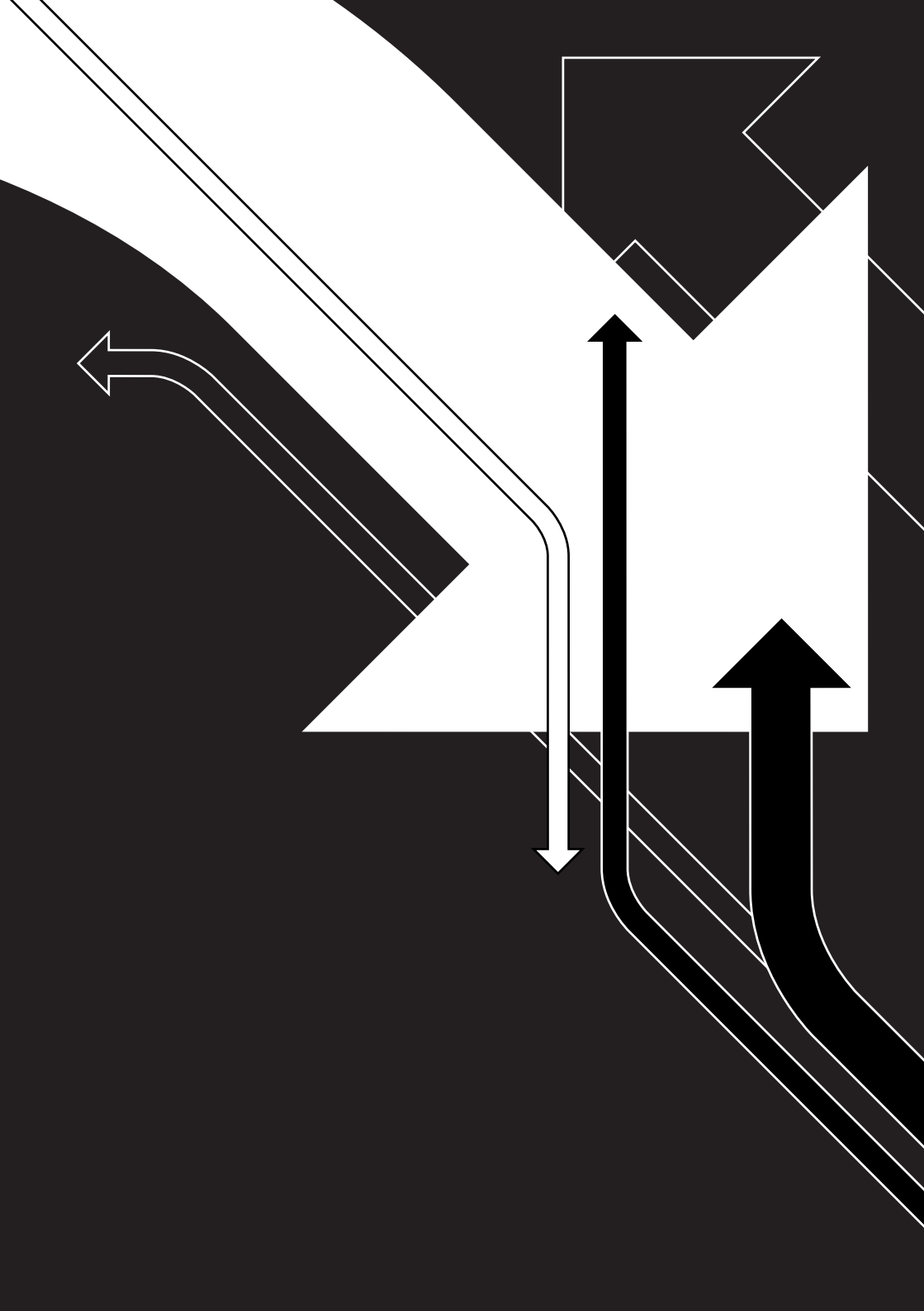
HUMAN RIGHTS?

Over the past four decades, initially, the right wing and then subsequently the Social Democrats, have succeeded in radically changing the attitudes of the population and legislation away from protection, residence, safety, and dignity for refugees and migrants towards closed borders, repatriation, racism, and discrimination.

It is feared that the next step will be to dismantle and rewrite the international conventions for the protection of human rights, among other things. The right-wing has already started to talk about Denmark withdrawing from the conventions that run counter to their interests. Morten Messerschmidt,

current leader of the DF, said in *Altinget* on 6 February 2024 that ‘... international rules for foreigners undermine our democracy’. He describes the conventions as a ‘harmful human rights dogma’. In the name of democracy, he (and others on the right) want to undermine what democracy is ostensibly based on, namely the principle of equality, the rule of law, and human rights.

Denmark was once a pioneer in terms of human rights, humanism, tolerance, and compliance with international conventions on immigration. Today, many praise Denmark as a pioneering country because it is doing the exact opposite.



FRANCE

PARLIAMENTARY THEATRE TO PASS THE MOST REPRESSIVE MIGRATION LAW FRANCE HAS EVER SEEN

By Aurélie Dianara

In the year leading up to the European elections, France's public debate has been literally saturated with the theme of immigration. Never mind that inflation is raging and people are struggling to make ends meet, that the number of people living below the poverty line has risen to more than 9 million, and that genocide is taking place in front of our eyes in Palestine. Never mind that immigration is only the 4th or 5th concern of French people, behind purchasing power, health, safety, and the environment. Never mind that France's immigration rate is below the European average and that the country only holds the 15th position in the EU's immigration ranking – there are 5,3 million foreigners in France (4,5 million non-French immigrants and 800 thousand people born in France of foreign nationality), which represents 7,8% of its population (against approximately 5% in the 1950s). Never mind that France has one of the highest rejection rates for asylum applications in Europe (70%). Despite all this, the media and political elites have been engaged for months in an endless discussion over a highly controversial law on asylum and immigration. A discussion that has been generally addressed through an identity- and security-driven perspective dominated by anxiety-inducing concepts of the far-right, such as that of a 'great replacement'.

The new law on asylum and immigration was announced during the summer of 2022, right after Emmanuel Macron and his then Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne forced through parliament their highly unpopular pension reform, after months of massive mobilisation and protest. This was the second law on immigration passed during Macron's presidency and the 30th law on immigration passed in France over the past 40 years. According to the Minister of the Interior who introduced the bill, Gérald Darmanin – sometimes nicknamed 'the despicable' for his past affinities with the far-right and because he has been accused of rape –, the objective of this new law was 'to be nice to the nice folks and bad to the bad folks'. In other words, to ease deportations and strengthen measures against immigration, while at the same time facil-

itating integration of the ‘good’ (understand useful) migrants. For instance, the initial bill proposed extending the possibilities of expulsion to parents of French children, spouses of French nationals and foreign nationals who have been in France for ten years, who were previously protected by law. On the other hand, it proposed the creation of one-year residence permits for undocumented workers in short-staffed jobs, for instance in the building, hotel, and restaurant sectors (article 3). This was supposed to satisfy both the left and the right and allow the government to obtain a majority to support the law. Unsurprisingly, it did not: the traditional right (*Les Républicains*) and the far-right (*Rassemblement National*) were firmly opposed to Article 3 and found the law too soft, whereas the left denounced the repressive nature of the law. The radical left (*La France Insoumise*), like several undocumented migrants’ associations, stressed that all undocumented workers should be regularised – not just those of chosen sectors.

The examination of the bill by Parliament (the Senate first, then the National Assembly) exacerbated tensions and marked the progressive victory of the far-right over the political debate. Under the influence of the right and far-right, which dominate the high chamber, the Senate suppressed Article 3 and bent the text towards an even more repressive aim. Amendments introduced, for instance, the idea of yearly migration quotas, and tougher rules on family reunification. One amendment even introduced the suppression of the State Medical Aid, social assistance that allows undocumented immigrants to have free access to health care if they earn less than 810 euros per month and have lived in France for more than three months. In other words, with this amendment, the concept of ‘national preference’, which has been one of the slogans of the far-right for decades, was introduced in the bill, and so were several of its long-standing proposals.

The bill was then submitted to the Assembly, where the left is stronger and where the government doesn’t have a parliamentary majority. The Assembly refused to even examine the text, adopting a motion for prior rejection put forward by the Greens (with 270 votes to 265). This vote created a small political crisis during which it was expected that Darmanin would have abandoned the bill or even that the government would have dissolved the Assembly, leading to a new general election. Instead, ‘the despicable’ decided to go on with his project and to force-pass his bill by appointing a joint parliamentary committee (made of seven senators and seven MPs) which negotiated a new text behind closed doors. With no parliamentary major-

ity, the government decided to rely on the traditional right to have its text adopted, which itself has been increasingly aligned with the far-right over the past years. Unsurprisingly, the text that came out of that negotiation was a terrible law⁵ that included many repressive proposals of the right and far-right and trampled on the most fundamental rights of immigrants and asylum seekers. So much so that several Macronist ministers even threatened to resign if the text was adopted. Of course, almost none of them did when the law was adopted with a large centre-to-far-right majority by the Assembly (349 to 186 votes) and the Senate in December.

Many of the worst measures included in the law – national preference, re-introduction of the felony of illegal residence, end of the *jus soli*, tougher access to family reunification or to residence permits for medical treatment, discrimination against foreign students, etc. – were then censured by the Constitutional Council, as they were considered unconstitutional, not in substance but in form. In sum, the measures that had brought the traditional right and far-right to support the text were eventually removed from the law. Nonetheless, what came out of this dark political-institutional sequence is the most racist and repressive law in France's history since 1945. For instance, the adopted law acts the removal of protection against deportation for certain previously protected non-French immigrants, authorises the creation of a register of delinquent unaccompanied minors, introduces a condition of « respect for the principles of the Republic » in order to obtain a residence permit, and includes a number of steps backwards in terms of asylum rights⁶, among other things by restricting access to material conditions of reception (accommodation and benefits).

Above all, this appalling episode orchestrated by the government has constituted another occasion for the right and far-right to colonise the public debate with their racist and repressive ideas. With this law, Macron and Darmanin hoped to cash in on the votes of the right-wing electorate in June. Instead, by framing the mediatic and political debates for months on the 'risks', the 'problem' and the 'cost' of immigration rather than on the opportunities and 'wealth' that it brings, by giving a very wide mediatic audience to the far-right representatives and commentators whereas the left was totally marginalised from the debate, by imposing historical keywords of the far-right such as the 'national preference' and the 'great replacement', this law has furthered the ideological advancement of the far-right. This was proclaimed triumphantly by the far-right leader, Marine Le Pen, on the day the text was adopted by

the chambers in December: ‘We can at least welcome an ideological advance, even an ideological victory for the *Rassemblement National*’.

This law also gave a golden opportunity for the right and far-right to campaign for a referendum on immigration, one of their long-standing demands. In a letter to the party leaders on November 5, Macron proposed to modify the Constitution to enlarge the scope of referendums to societal questions, such as immigration. *Les Républicains*, *Rassemblement National*, and the even further right-wing *Reconquête* promote this idea. This perspective is all the more problematic that a majority of French people consider that they are ill-informed on immigration and that polls show that the less people are knowledgeable about immigration, the more they are opposed to it. Confronting these referendum proposals, about ninety associations, personalities, and researchers called for the organisation of a Citizen Assembly on migration⁷ so that France can have a rational debate on the question and push back against strategies that instrumentalise immigration.

Unfortunately, a calmer debate on the theme of migration is not what Macron and the government want. Quite the opposite: right after passing the 30th repressive immigration law since 1980, they launched yet another propagandist offensive. In February, Darmanin announced the abolition of *jus soli* in Mayotte, the overseas French archipelago located in the Indian Ocean, from where migrants arrive near Comoros. Of course, suppressing *jus soli* in Mayotte would not solve the archipelago’s many problems, and would introduce a rupture of equality between this department and the rest of France. Besides, *jus soli* is already restricted in France, as children born in France from non-French parents can only obtain their French nationality at the age of 18 if they still live in France. The government’s strategy of appealing to far-right voters continues to fail and to boost the descendants of French fascism. Unsurprisingly, today, the polls⁸ show the *Rassemblement National* as the clear winner of the upcoming European elections, far ahead of Macron’s list and of the many split lists of the left.

As international instability keeps worsening, and the number of displaced people in the world has more than doubled in the past decade because of conflicts or climate change, it is urgent that the left manages to regain control over the migration debate and presents an alternative, positive, and inclusive vision of migration policy.

GERMANY

FROM GUEST WORKER POLICY TO FREEDOM-DEPRIVING MEASURES AGAINST MIGRANTS

by Rabab Douwa and Thana Douwa
(Migrantifa Rhein-Main)

A HYPOCRITICAL DEBATE

In the early days of 2024, media and politicians were horrified by a ‘secret meeting’ organised by rich entrepreneurs from right-wing circles, including members of the AfD and the Christian Democratic Union (CDU). The agenda of the meeting included plans for ‘remigration’ or deportation of migrants. In response, broad alliances supported by the government mobilised a wave of ‘anti-AfD’ demonstrations with, at times, hundreds of thousands of participants. In an effort to distance themselves from the far-right discourse (and the secret meeting), forces from the so-called political centre warned of a shift to the right, of which they themselves had, in fact, long been the central driving force. The political theatre playing out was bordering on the absurd.

Two weeks after October 7, Olaf Scholz’s portrait appeared on the cover of the magazine *Spiegel*. ‘We must finally deport on a grand scale’ was the headline. Three months later, in January 2024, he commented on the plans of remigration that had been uncovered. With the words: ‘You are one of us! Our country needs you!’, he addressed migrants in Germany directly. In August 2023, Interior Minister and the Socialist Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) politician Nancy Faeser presented a draft law to tighten asylum law. Part of this was the demand to introduce a similar form of kin punishment, i.e. collective conviction, sanctioning and, subsequently, deportation of a family on the basis of one single-family members’ transgression. The bill was only overturned by a narrow margin.

The people were inundated daily with constructed debates about ‘imported’ or ‘Arab’ anti-Semitism, sentiments against shisha bars and ‘Arab clan families’, and the press’ racist witch hunt of migrant and Palestine-solidarity activists. At the same time, we see the construction of one of Europe’s largest

deportation centres in the immediate vicinity of BER airport, planned for fast-track deportation of migrants. So far, there has been no significant political resistance.

CONTINUITIES

Neither the debates themselves nor the measures to restrict migration and asylum are at all new. They are accompanied by a fundamentally racist devaluation of non-white life. The current migration regime means deprivation of freedom, extensive state control, and punitive economic measures. This reveals interesting parallels with the 'prison-industrial complex' described in the US, which examines the exploitation of prison inmates in the interaction between the state and economy. We will return to this later.

Asylum, refugee, and immigration policy in Germany has always been a reflection of economic interests and the labour market. This is exemplified by the guest worker policies of the 1950s and 1960s, which in the following decades turned into a discourse on integration and, ultimately exclusion. Until well into the 1970s, thousands of so-called guest workers were recruited for economic reconstruction after the war. Migrants were supposed to come to Germany temporarily, as 'guests'. They were to be integrated exclusively into the labour sector and housed in their own residential areas, apart from German society.

The end of this campaign was followed by a phase of illegalisation of migration. People who continued to come to Germany were structurally pushed from a legal to an illegal labour market. The 1980s saw an increase in right-wing violence against foreigners, with pogroms reaching a peak in the 1990s.

The increase in the number of asylum seekers after the GDR was incorporated into the Federal Republic became the trigger for the blossoming of xenophobic narratives, which are still repeated today. Narratives about the alleged dangers of immigration and the abuse of social benefits were widely disseminated. The resulting anti-immigration sentiment provided the basis for a massive restriction of the German 'Grundgesetz' (Basic Law). The target was Article 16, which since 1949 had granted an enforceable

individual right to asylum. In 1993, this article was replaced and restricted as part of the so-called ‘asylum compromise’. In addition, the Asylum Seekers’ Benefits Act was introduced, which is still in force today and has excluded asylum seekers from the German social system for over 30 years.

In the same year, the ‘Third Country Regulation’ (predecessor to the Dublin Regulation) was introduced, which made migration to Germany, in particular, more difficult from within the continent. Regulations on ‘safe’ and ‘unsafe’ countries of origin were introduced. Deportation and asylum rejection processes were made easier, and the so-called airport procedure was introduced. This means that people arriving by plane can be detained at the airport for up to 19 days in order to examine their refugee status and speed up the asylum process. The current situation is an exacerbated reflection of the political situation created back in 1993.

MEASURES AGAINST PERSONAL FREEDOMS

Building on the ‘asylum compromise’ of 1993, further restrictions were adopted with the asylum packages I and II of 2015 and 2016, the Integration Act of 2016 and the Migration Pact of 2020. These laws promoted a threefold deprivation of freedom: spatial, economic, and personal/direct.

The measures that deprive people of their freedom spatially include the residence obligation, compulsory accommodation in a refugee centre, and housing restrictions. In Asylum Package I, the mandatory stay of asylum seekers in refugee centres was extended to six months for the first time; in the years that followed, the period continued to increase until the decision was made in 2019 that asylum seekers must remain in these facilities until the end of their application process (up to 18 months). In some cases, this time is extended if the procedure is blocked, or asylum is rejected. In addition, asylum seekers are subject to the residence obligation, which states that they must stay within a certain area (depending on the federal state) for as long as their asylum procedure is ongoing. This also applies to people with tolerated status for three months. Violation of the residence obligation can be punished with a fine of up to € 2,500 or a prison sentence of up to one year. This restriction on freedom of movement contradicts the Geneva Refugee Convention. If the residence obligation does not apply and the source of income is uncertain, the residence obligation is followed by the housing restrictions, which limit the place of residence to a certain geographical

area, which is accordingly linked to the district of the responsible authority.

The measures to restrict freedom of movement are about controllability so that refugees cannot escape regulations and the bureaucracy. They are constantly reminded that freedom of movement does not apply to them.

Measures that deprive people of their economic freedom include restrictions on access to the labour market and the payment of benefits. Access to the labour market is blocked during their time in the initial refugee centres. Since 2015, refugees who have come from 'safe' countries of origin do not receive a work permit as long as they do not have a long-term residence permit. Since the Asylum Package I of 2015, benefits can be paid out in kind instead of cash. In November 2023, it was decided to introduce nationwide payment cards, which are intended to prevent money from being sent abroad and severely restrict the ability to control one's finances. The state determines what are benefits and permitted consumer goods. The reduction of benefits for asylum seekers is publicly legitimised by the claim of relief for the state budget.

The so-called asylum compromise of 1993 made it possible to enforce an obligation to work, which had not been previously executed. This, however, has recently changed. Since February 2024, in parts of Bavaria and Thuringia, refugees have been obliged to work. They are forced to do four hours of community service per day (currently mainly at refugee accommodation centres) and paid a 'symbolic' 80 cents per hour. If they do not fulfil this obligation, they can be deprived of benefits amounting to €50-100. The introduction of such regulations, which conceal the fact that access to the regular labour market is blocked, feeds an anti-immigrant narrative, which in turn creates the basis for the intensification of such practices.

A parallel with the conditions in US prisons is particularly obvious here. Compulsory labour measures mean super-exploitation and discipline. In the event of refusal, despite unreasonable demands, there is a threat of sanctions that can amount to almost twice a month's salary. Refugees are already materially dependent on the state. There are signs of an increase in economic control and exploitation with a trend towards the suspension of general workers' rights.

Restrictions that personally or directly deprive people of their freedom include limited data protection, eased deportation procedures, and the general tightening of deportation processes. Asylum Package I makes it easier to deport sick people. Since 2015, deportations no longer have to be announced in advance. The ‘Repatriation Improvement Act’ of 2024 allows the police to inspect entire refugee shelters. Previously, this was only possible for the room of the person being sought. The same law allows the police to check mobile devices in order to verify asylum status; suspicious circumstances are not necessary. This allows the police to raid accommodations, effectively abolishing privacy for refugees. They are placed under general suspicion for violating residence conditions, criminalised, and dehumanised. The precarious situation, the danger to the lives of refugees and migrants in their countries of departure are used to exert pressure and make them compliant in Germany. But a political goal of increasing the number of deportations indifferently accepts or willfully ignores these threatening circumstances.

GOOD AND BAD MIGRANTS: THE WELCOME CULTURE

Parallel to the tightening of the laws in 2015, a Welcome Culture was performed as a response to the Syrian civil war. The government presented itself as having moral integrity, while at the same time imposing restrictions within the asylum laws. The state took a two-pronged approach and sowed division between the vulnerable and the marginalised. Even today, a selective Welcome Culture for skilled workers contrasts with ever higher barriers being erected for other migrant groups. The Skilled Immigration Act (FEG) passed in 2020 is intended to make it easier for qualified skilled workers, especially those from non-EU countries, to enter the country and work. According to the new law, people with completed vocational training and university graduates are considered qualified. Further changes to the FEG were adopted in November 2023. Qualified skilled workers are entitled to residency; asylum seekers are excluded from these regulations.

By courting highly qualified workers, forcing migrants without formal qualifications into the low-wage sector, and structurally declassifying them, an active policy of division is being pursued, with a broad arsenal of narratives. Marginalised people are pitted against each other with labels such as ‘those unwilling to integrate’, ‘economic migrants’ or simply good and bad migrants.

This also includes political discourse about ‘anti-Semitic foreigners’, which is translated into initial measures and field trials. Residency and naturalisation are made conditional on a commitment to Israel’s right to exist, as is the case in Saxony-Anhalt, for example. Anti-Semitism is defined as a characteristic of migrants, just like sexism, homophobia or criminality.

EVALUATION AND OUTLOOK

In their book *Abolitionism*, Thompson and Loick write about the tradition of ideas for the abolition of prisons. They refer to Ruth Wilson Gilmore, who establishes the connection between the construction of new prisons and state crisis regulation. The state first creates the structural problems of poverty in order to offer the public the prison system as a supposed solution to multiple crises. Thompson and Loick specifically address the function of prisons as (re)producing violence, as instruments of isolation, humiliation, and disenfranchisement of prisoners. The extent to which elements of the analysis of the ‘prison-industrial complex’ can be transferred to the migration and asylum regime is still a task to be carried out.

Migration and asylum policy in the Federal Republic of Germany reflect the economic and political situation. It serves to compensate for economic and demographic deficits and, at the same time, offers a space for the political projection of socio-economic crises.

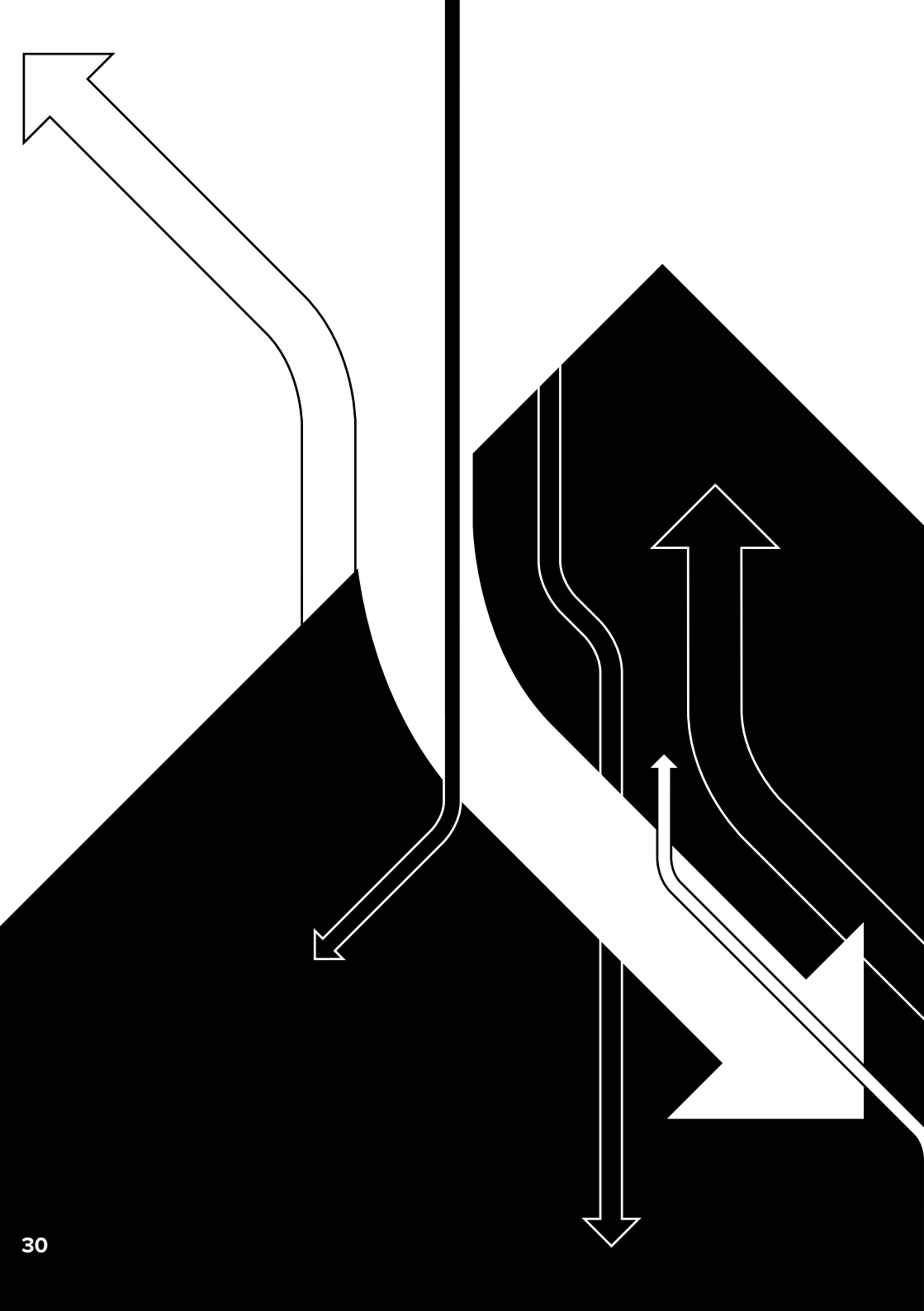
Central causes of migration (wars, climate change, and global inequality) are not only structurally intertwined with the capitalist system, but the Federal Republic of Germany is also actively pushing them forward. Bundeswehr (German military forces) participation in military missions in West and Central Asia or in North and West Africa, neo-colonial measures such as ‘Green Deals’, which promote the prolongation of underdevelopment and dependency in the Global South, one-sided economic agreements and a development policy guided by capital interests, as well as the refusal to pay for its own colonial crimes, all create the conditions that force people to flee and migrate.

Internally, migration policy acts as a regulatory mechanism to divert attention from the real causes of social upheaval, such as rising food prices, child and pensioner poverty, and exponentially rising rents. The construction of refugees as scapegoats plays a key role. Political debates about migration

offer right-wing demagogues a public sphere that they use to deliberately divide the various population groups affected by poverty.

Germany's immigration and asylum legislation creates a close-meshed control and dependency regime to which migrants must submit in order to apply for residence status. Everything is put to the test and is subject to the burden of proof, from refugee status to the ability to integrate, which is measured by the fulfilment of bureaucratic requirements, the acceptance of unworthy working conditions or the use of approved benefits. There is a state of subjugation and a culture of intimidation from which migrants and refugees must gradually try to fight their way out in the interests of 'integration'. Their right to privacy, freedom of movement, and dignity must fall by the wayside. Even if they succeed, what will remain in the end is a racist and exclusionary discourse.

Migrants and refugees are reduced to economic objects and turned into shunting masses for political crisis management. Overexploitation, isolation, criminalisation, and existential fears safeguard the fundamentally useful economic function of migrant labour. A fortress is being built to protect the borders. Those who overcome the fortress are punished with a status of imprisonment and disenfranchisement, and a parallel existence to the rest of the population.



POLAND

MIGRATION POLICY AS CONTROLLED INFLOW AND OUTFLOW OF LABOUR DEMAND

By Pawel Wargan

THE POLITICAL DEBATE

As in large parts of the Western world, the debate on migration in Poland straddles two seemingly contradictory political narratives. One frames migration as a question of national security and produces policies of exclusion. The other frames migration as a moral or economic imperative and produces policies of openness.

Europe's so-called 'migrant crisis' — in Poland, expressed most keenly during the influx of refugees across the Polish-Belarusian border from August 2021 — falls in the first category. Poland's political response was characterised by a dramatic escalation in state violence, including pushbacks and the construction of a border wall, with little in the way of coordinated policy action. The liberal reaction, including by Poland's parliamentary left and the non-governmental sector, focuses largely on criticisms of police violence and accusations that Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko was weaponising migration as part of a 'hybrid war' against the European Union — narratives that ignore the root causes of migration.

In contrast, the mass inflow of Ukrainian migrants following the 'Euromaidan' coup d'état in 2014 — and, in particular, after the escalation of hostilities in February 2022 — saw Poland adopt an open-door policy. Migration from Poland's eastern periphery was framed as an instrument to help plug gaps in Poland's labour market or a moral obligation. Despite the almost decade-long struggle to formulate a migration policy in Poland, new measures were introduced in record time. Just three weeks after Russia's entry into the war in Ukraine, the Polish government passed legislation underpinning the broad financial and social support available for Ukrainian citizens in Poland today.

Despite attempts to frame the question of migration in partisan terms, the leading Polish political parties largely represent a united front. Donald Tusk's liberal Civic Platform (PO), which returned to power following the October 2023 parliamentary elections, has preserved the policies and rhetoric of his predecessors — despite repeated appeals by civil society organisations that he abandon the policy of pushbacks.⁹ 'Please believe me — and I say this looking at the situation in the US — that this is a question of the very survival of our Western civilisation,' Tusk said in February 2024. 'Either we wake up and understand that we have to protect our territory, our borders, that our world will collapse if we remain open to all forms of migration with no controls'¹⁰.

The Civic Coalition (KO), a group of liberal parties in which the PO holds the overwhelming majority of seats, has emphasised that Poland's border will 'remain secure', and has committed to 'modernising' the border fence built under the Law and Justice (PiS) government.¹¹ Tusk has also been clear that Poland would continue to refuse to subscribe to the EU's Migration Pact resettlement scheme for refugees,¹² vowing that Poland would 'not accept a single migrant'.¹³

In liberal discourse, the debate has largely dodged the underlying economic questions, focusing instead on the extent to which Poland should veer towards 'multiculturalism' or 'assimilation' — balancing the needs of the economy and of security. Katarzyna Chimiak, director of the migration program at the Institute of Public Affairs, summed up the liberal position clearly: 'People that come to Poland bring with them knowledge and skills... They are not a burden. They are capital'¹⁴.

POLAND'S EMIGRATION CRISIS

Immigration into Poland cannot be understood outside the context of the mass exodus of Poland's own working population. Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004 saw over two million Polish workers leave for other European nations facing high demand for low-paid labour, primarily Great Britain and Ireland.¹⁵ In a 2013 survey, 14 per cent of adult Poles admitted to having worked abroad for some period of time since 2004 — a quarter of them for over a year.¹⁶

At that time, migration came to be understood as part of a solution to

the dramatic labour shortages that emerged across key areas of Poland's economy. In response, in 2006 and 2007 the Polish government introduced a new and simplified process for hiring foreign workers. Initially, this process applied to select jobs in the agricultural sector and was limited to Poland's neighbouring countries. Soon, the limitations were dropped and the scheme was made available to Armenians, Belorussians, Georgians, Moldovans, Russians, and Ukrainians.

In 2012, the Polish government adopted a document called Poland's Migration Policy – Current Status and Proposed Actions¹⁷ — the first attempt to articulate a national migration policy since 1989. The post-EU accession period, the document said, '...created space for changes in the Polish labour market and created demands for foreign labour'¹⁸ to plug the gaps left by the departure of Polish workers. That guiding document was abandoned by the PiS government shortly after it came to power in 2015, and attempts to develop a new policy were beset by delays and controversy. To this day, Poland has no formal migration policy and its approach to migration has been haphazard and reactive.¹⁹

A TALE OF TWO MIGRANTS

Poland's labour shortage had a significant impact on capital, especially in the agricultural and construction sectors.²⁰ 'Whether we like it or not, we need a large number of workers, mainly from the East,' Dariusz Blocher, the Chief Executive Officer of Budimex, Poland's largest construction firm, said in 2017. 'There are construction sites in Poland, where about 50 per cent of workers are foreigners, mainly from the East: Ukraine, Belarus, Moldavia,' Blocher said.²¹ More than 680,000 foreign nationals received legal residency in Poland in 2017, 90 per cent of them receiving work visas. The vast majority of these were migrants from Ukraine seeking better work in Poland.²² Ukraine's GDP had halved following the 2014 coup d'état, and the subsequent liberalisation measures that opened Ukraine to imperialist capital penetration and saw labour rights plummet. Today, some 756,000 Ukrainian citizens have formal jobs in Poland — primarily across administrative services, industry, construction, and transport.²³

The integration of Eastern European labour into the Polish economy stands in stark contrast with Poland's attitude towards refugees from the largely-

Muslim countries of West Asia. Beginning in 2015, the political debate in Poland shifted due to the influx of refugees into Europe. Migration was now seen primarily as a security concern and a threat to social cohesion. The PO-led government, caving to pressure from the European Union, reluctantly agreed to admit 6,200 migrants as part of the EU resettlement scheme. That year, PiS took power with the strongest electoral victory post-socialist Poland had seen. It did so in part on a radical anti-immigrant platform. During his electoral campaign, PiS's leader Jarosław Kaczyński infamously warned that migrants carried 'parasites and protozoa'.²⁴ Despite his disavowal of PiS's rhetoric, Donald Tusk has consistently opposed the EU's relocation scheme in his later role as President of the European Council, framing the issue as one of EU external border security.²⁵

In its 2019 attempt to articulate a new migration policy, the PiS government sought to accommodate the two perspectives on migration. Poland's migration policy, a document released on 10 June 2019, addressed Poland's economic needs '...in terms of acquiring foreign workers with appropriate skills to fill shortages on the labour market resulting from existing demographic trends'. At the same time, it sought to strengthen defence '... in the context of a growing influx of economic migrants and the increased risk of their radicalisation in terms of their religion or worldviews'.²⁶ The document set out measures concerning the assimilation of immigrants to prevent the formation of 'parallel societies' that undermine 'national unity and overall security in Poland'. The document was withdrawn following extensive criticism from Polish civil society, and a new version never emerged.

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH

Migration from Muslim countries was never large enough in scale to pose either a 'security risk or a major economic advantage to Poland. But Muslim refugees provided useful fodder for political polarisation, dividing the working class while papering over the unity of the Polish ruling class on key questions of policy. Poland provided fertile ground for the anti-immigrant rhetoric sweeping across Europe. The Polish Catholic Church played a powerful role in toppling the socialist Polish People's Republic (PRL). In the 1990s, it moved quickly to align itself with the more reactionary elements of the new capitalist order. The Third Republic, then, emerged with a sacred

genealogy. In the hands of the PiS government in particular, Poland has seen attempts at the desecularisation of the state and the rhetoric of a ‘Poland for Poles’ — a claim to white, European Christendom. Often, the ‘migrant crisis’ was framed explicitly in these terms, as a clash of cultures in which ‘economic migrants’ from West Asia sought to erode Poland’s Christian identity.

THE ROLE OF US IMPERIALISM

The case of Budimex is in many ways exemplary of the transformations that took place since the fall of the PRL and the integration of Poland into the US-led imperialist system. Under the PRL, Budimex was among several Polish state-owned companies to take up commissions in former colonies. In the 1970s and 1980s, it worked on a number of projects in Baghdad, Iraq, spanning urban design and construction.²⁷ These took place within the framework of socialist internationalism adopted by countries across the Eastern Bloc.

The fall of the PRL and Poland’s accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) saw a fundamental transformation in Poland’s international outlook. First, Poland became a partner in the US’s imperialist wars in West Asia, including its war of aggression against Iraq, which had major destabilising effects and contributed to the displacement of tens of millions of people. Second, it began to follow its Western partners in adopting policies hostile to the victims of these wars. For example, in 2022, Budimex completed work on building Poland’s 106-kilometre border fence with Belarus²⁸ intended to block the movement of refugees into Europe, who also became pawns in the West’s ambitions to overthrow the ruling government of Belarus. Third, it saw the significant depletion of Poland’s workforce as millions moved West to pursue higher incomes. Fourth, it itself became the beneficiary of migration from countries further East, whose workers were able to plug the kinds of gaps identified by the Budimex CEO.

These transformations speak to Poland’s unique position in the hierarchy of the US-led imperialist system. On the one hand, Poland has fallen victim to the policies of liberalisation mandated as part of its accession to the imperialist order. These policies saw the mass privatisation of Polish industry and the penetration of foreign capital into Poland’s economy and produced a mass exodus of its workers. On the other hand, Poland was

able to benefit from its subordinate position in the imperialist system. It received colossal financial handouts from the European Union, chiefly from Germany. And it was able to absorb vast reserves of cheap labour from its Eastern periphery — predominantly from countries that have themselves been subject to US regime-change efforts and accompanying processes of liberalisation, transitions that received vigorous support from successive Polish governments. Poland, in other words, has emerged both as exploiter and exploited — a dialectic whose contradictions express themselves powerfully in its seemingly confused, piecemeal approach to the question of migration.

THE POLISH PROLETARIAT

Today, the overwhelming majority of Poles hold favourable views on the US, EU, and NATO.²⁹ As these forces are the primary vehicles for the advance of imperialist globalisation, this represents a significant obstacle towards the development of working-class consciousness and a meaningful anti-capitalist horizon. The few left-wing trade unions that operate in the country largely limit themselves to general critiques of neoliberalism and globalisation, failing to identify the specific dynamics within imperialism that produce the conditions for outward and inward migration. Beyond these groups, the majority of the Polish proletariat is demobilised and depoliticised.

SWITZERLAND

FROM BUNKERS AS ACCOMMODATION TO THE NORMALISATION OF RACIST DEBATES

By Andrin Mando

On the eve of the EU elections, an electoral victory for the ultra-right factions is emerging despite the historically unprecedented tightening of Europe's external borders. In Switzerland, the so-called shift to the right has long since taken place. Here we take a look at the emergence and implementation of the new far-right in the heart of Fortress Europe.

The far-right has many names in Europe: in Poland PiS, in France Rassemblement National, in Austria FPÖ, in Hungary Fidesz, in Italy Fratelli d'Italia, in Germany most likely AfD, in Spain Vox, in Sweden Sweden Democrats, in Greece Nea Dimokratia (ND). In Switzerland, it is called the Swiss People's Party (SVP). Unlike in other European countries, it is not a new phenomenon. It has been part of the government for decades. It holds two of the seven seats in the Federal Council. In the fall of 2023, it won the parliamentary elections and confirmed its position as the most popular party for the third time in a row with a 27.9% share of the vote. The SVP's inflammatory politics have long dictated the pace in the media and politically. Its dominance – particularly in matters of migration and immigration – is reflected in the fact that political debates always refer directly or indirectly to the SVP in some way.

The rise of the SVP began in the 1990s. Back then, it succeeded in preventing Switzerland from joining the EU. A victory against all other parties that were in favour of EU integration. Banks, pharmaceutical companies, industry, employers' and trade associations and most wealthy families were in favour of a Yes to Europe. On the capital side, only the farmers' association, which was already SVP-dominated at the time, and some small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) followed the SVP. For SMEs, it was already doubtful at the time whether the EU liberalisation project would benefit them. Compared to large, multinational companies, SMEs can rarely

outsource their production. They benefit less from deregulated markets. Regulations on state territories tend to protect them from being eaten up by larger competitors. In this context, the SVP demagogically presented itself as the militant defender of direct democracy, neutrality, and independence, without ever raising the question of ownership. The SVP achieved a majority through nationalism, racism, and agitation against migrants as well as anti-intellectualism against liberal politics. All of this has never disappeared from the public stage since.

RIGHT-WING EXTREMIST CONSENSUS

Over the years, the SVP succeeded in shifting the bourgeois-democratic framework more and more. At some point, the unspeakable was articulated, the demonised electable, and the unimaginable simply politically enforced. This is reflected in increasingly discriminatory laws, court rulings, official practices, institutional procedures, and regulations. Instead of setting fire to asylum camps, the SVP has the authorities put underground, isolated asylum bunkers into operation in order to deport people more systematically and at the same time have lawyers check that everything is being done in accordance with human rights.

However, it is not only the SVP that is responsible for the spread and dominance of far-right positions. Other (centre-)right-wing parties hold positions, particularly on migration and asylum policy, that usually differ from the SVP at most in tone. The parliamentary left, consisting of the Social Democratic Party (SPS) and the Greens, is also partly responsible: it runs after the voters, shies away from internationalist positions, and communicates with a kind of welfare state nationalism. The pension system, social insurance, and social partnership are not presented and defended as class compromises, but as specifically Swiss achievements. Although it distances itself militantly from the extreme right, the parliamentary 'left' is far from fundamentally breaking with the SVP. Instead, it has governed and politicised collegially side by side with the SVP for years.

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RACIST MIGRATION REGIME

‘Too many are coming and the wrong ones.’ This was the SVP’s election slogan in 2023. They are tightening up and lashing out at the authorities and other parties. However, today’s migration regime is supported and significantly shaped by the same forces that were in favour of EU accession back then – partly with and partly against the SVP. The result can be described as a two-circle regime: An inner circle with its own rules for citizens from the EU/EFTA area and an outer circle for those coming from outside this region. Since the two circles are hierarchically unequal and the interests of migrants from both circles of origin are subordinated to national economic interests, this is a racist and profit oriented regime.

Relative freedom of movement applies to migration from the inner circle. Those who can secure a work contract or have assets are allowed to settle for longer periods. However, anyone who loses their job risks losing their right to stay sooner or later. Due to the growing influence of the SVP, freedom of movement within the inner circle has been significantly curtailed. The criterion for admissibility is always the same: is this migrant economically viable? As soon as this is doubted, they lose their ‘value’ in capitalist society.

Since 2014, the mass Immigration Initiative 1 has given priority to nationals. Since then, job vacancies must first be filled by Swiss nationals. The Deportation Initiative 2, at the end of 2010, introduced double punishment for migrants. Certain criminal offences are now punished not only once with imprisonment but a second time with deportation. In addition, integration requirements were introduced and tightened as part of various revisions to the law. Anyone who does not speak the language well enough or has debts now also risks losing their right to stay.

Migrants from the outer circle are subject to an infinitely higher level of

violence than those from the inner circle. In principle, they are not allowed to immigrate to Switzerland. Exceptions are only made for a limited contingent of privileged, well-educated workers. These must be explicitly invited by Swiss companies. In order to curb immigration from the outer circle more effectively, Switzerland joined the Schengen/Dublin Agreement in 2004. This cemented the Europe-wide closure to the global South. Twenty years after Switzerland joined the Schengen area, its external borders consist of a gigantic area of surveillance, control, violence, and death. As a non-EU country, Switzerland also shares responsibility for this.

TRADE UNION SUPPORT

In order to fully understand the developments of the Swiss migration regime, it is worth looking at the unions who could potentially form a counter-power. Similar to the parliamentary left, the trade unions have not adopted a fundamental oppositional stance to the government's immigration policies.

New and surprisingly powerful instruments called 'flanking measures' have been granted to the unions. In order to monitor wage pressure in companies and sectors more closely, trade unions are allowed to carry out wage inspections and company visits. If violations of collective agreements (in Switzerland, collective employment agreements) or standard wage and working conditions are regularly identified, the trade unions have the right to appeal to the Federal Council to regulate working conditions in a generally binding manner. If they succeed in doing so, all companies in an industry must comply with the conditions dictated by the Federal Council, which in turn can be monitored by trade unions.

Alas, the decades-lasting loss of general membership, the resulting weakness in mobilizing and exerting any power on the street and in the productions sector has led to a reliance on the bureaucratic crutch of the 'flanking measures' to secure income and opportunities. The result is, that while the Swiss unions are approving the liberalisation of the labour market within Europe (the inner circle), they remain silent when job-seeking migrants from the outer circle are beaten and left to die at Europe's external borders.

DYSTOPIAN CONDITIONS – SWITZERLAND AS A ROLE MODEL FOR THE EU

Switzerland is the European champion when it comes to deportations. The State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) proudly reminds us every year that ‘Switzerland remains one of the countries with the highest enforcement rates in Europe’. In 2023, 3.719 people were forcibly removed from the country. That’s 10 people every day. In order to achieve this quota, the SEM signed deportation agreements with various third-party countries.

Resistance to deportations is made more difficult by the fact that the authorities can keep the time of deportation under wraps. People disappear without ever being able to say goodbye. In most cases, the people concerned first disappear into detention pending deportation. This can last up to 18 months. A comparison with Germany shows the harshness of the Swiss regime: the German parliament recently tightened the rules and extended the so-called ‘exit detention’ from 10 to 28 days after much wrangling and protest – that is 18 times less than in Switzerland.

On December 20, 2023, the EU institutions and EU member states agreed to reform the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). The German NGO ProAsyl spoke of a ‘dystopian vision of a Europe of detention camps’ that is now becoming a reality. In Switzerland, the dystopian camp policy has been in force since 2019. At that time, the authorities intensified their camp policy. Huge camps for hundreds of people were opened all over the country. Most of these are in isolated locations, often even in underground bunkers. In these camps, attendance requirements restrict freedom. It is usually only possible to go out during the day from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.; private security companies control the detainees’ movements. The care staff also work for profit-oriented companies. There are strict house rules and there are no or only limited cooking facilities; everyone has to eat the same food at prescribed times. The camps are surrounded by high fences, which are supplemented by constant camera surveillance. All this gives the camps a prison-like character that is in no way inferior to the camps at the external borders announced as part of the pan-European asylum reform.

PRACTICAL SOLIDARITY

The clearest criticism of the far-right consensus and the racist migration regime is currently being formulated by numerous small grassroots initiatives. The groups rarely manage to coordinate with each other. Nevertheless, there is a kind of extra-parliamentary solidarity between them, which is occasionally expressed in campaigns. One example of this is the referendum against Frontex. This was launched by grassroots initiatives when the annual Frontex contribution was increased to CHF 61 million in 2021. Although the referendum failed at the ballot box, the campaign raised public awareness of Switzerland's responsibility for violence, misery, and deaths at the Schengen area's external borders.

With the aim of abolishing the prison-like refugee camps, various activist networks are mainly using the weapon of solidarity. The state-created material hardship is broken through donations in kind, social isolation is responded to with visiting groups, spatial isolation is alleviated by providing transport tickets and undermined by hidden solidarity housing opportunities. Abuses are documented and serve as a starting point for political and public pressure. Although their influence is limited and often isolated, these initiatives are a practical response to the further normalisation of the racist Swiss migration regime.

PUSHING EUROPEAN BORDERS ACROSS THE MEDITERRANEAN

By Abdelouahad El Mir

Italy's migration management policies have maintained a consistent approach over an extended period, irrespective of whether the government in power is centre-left or centre-right. This continuity has become even more evident in relation to the management of refugees, which became one of the main themes of electoral campaigns following the migrations resulting from the 'Arab Springs'. Italian governments have essentially operated within the same framework, characterized by demands such as the request for a revision of the Dublin Regulation³⁰ or by increased criminalisation and policing of undocumented persons through bureaucratic laws and administration such as hiring quotas for workers from non-EU countries and repressive actions against NGO's engaged in rescue operations or asylum rights defenders.

The results achieved by both political factions have not been a reduction of arrivals, as often promised during election campaigns, but an increase in the presence of 'irregular' (undocumented) people on Italian territory. These individuals are difficult to repatriate according to international law and can easily find irregular and informal employment in the labour market.

The adopted political approach has rather regulated the constant entry of workers from non-EU countries, which are kept in a disadvantaged condition by being deprived of a residence permit and, therefore, are forced into employment in the informal economy. This workforce is crucial for the national economy, especially in sectors already characterised by a strong presence of foreign workers and seasonal employment, such as personal and collective services (31.6%), agriculture (17.7%), catering (17.3%), and construction (15.6%).

According to the ISMU³¹ Foundation in 2023, the number of undocumented people was estimated at over 458,000, a figure that is expected to increase following recent decrees that increase the difficulty of obtaining a residence permit. The structural shortage of labour inspectors, the political will

not to disturb the interests of strategic sectors of the Italian economy, and the presence of almost half a million undocumented persons have represented fundamental elements of functioning for Italian capitalism. The availability of irregular labour, easily exploitable and therefore low-cost, has compensated for the limited investments in innovation and research, impacting the competitiveness and profitability of the Italian economy.

The management of migration is inevitably linked to Italy's colonial past, albeit with a different history compared to other European countries. It was expressed by the support for the NATO mission to destabilise Libya. It has seen almost unanimous support from political forces in the Italian parliament, and today the government works tirelessly to build relationships with Libyan factions. This commitment began to yield results in 2018 when departures from Libyan shores began to decrease significantly, while 2023 will be remembered as the year when departures from Tunisia surpassed those from Libya.

The relationship with former colonies is not limited to North Africa but also extends to the Horn of Africa, a region of great relevance for the energy sector and international trade. The Italian proposal for a Ministerial Conference for the Horn of Africa in 2022, along with the Mattei Plan (see below), are part of this process. Economic and political interaction between Italy, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia has steadily increased over the past 10 years, driven mainly by the need to manage external borders, regulate the transit of labour, ensure energy supplies, and obtain structural investments in infrastructure and telecommunications.

The Italian model of migration governance in recent decades is characterised by fake news, strongly racist narratives, slogans, and an overproduction of legislation – albeit partial – that tends to intensify repression against migrants and refugees and increasingly reduces spaces for protection and respect for human rights. The data emerging in the last year of government activity under the Meloni administration highlights a pronounced authoritarian trend. Over 70% of laws were passed through emergency decrees, a tool usually used only in urgent conditions, bypassing the ordinary democratic process and parliamentary debate. This trend has also been evident in other legislative areas, raising questions about the functioning of Italian 'democracy', which ignores or trivialises parliamentary debate and concentrates power in the hands of the government.

In this contribution, we will provide a brief overview of the main Italian migration policies, dividing them into internal and external management approaches, and critically examine their limitations and the effects often obscured by the dominant political and mediatic narrative.

INTERNAL MANAGEMENT OF MIGRATIONS

DECREE AGAINST NGO SHIPS

The first measure issued by the Meloni government in January 2023 on the topic of immigration was Decree-Law No. 1/2023, also known as the ‘Code of Conduct for NGOs’. Building on the regulatory framework introduced by former Interior Minister Marco Minniti (from the Democratic Party), the Meloni government supports the narrative that NGOs conducting search and rescue operations in the central Mediterranean are engaging in facilitating irregular immigration from North Africa, rather than focusing on saving human lives as established by maritime and international law and the Italian Constitution. This narrative, already debunked by various researchers and analysts, is linked to the securitisation narrative promoted by the far-right, which speaks of ‘invasion’ and “ethnic replacement”. The latter term has also been openly used by members of the government, such as Agriculture Minister Francesco Lollobrigida during the Congress of the Cisl Union. The code of conduct established by the decree-law significantly complicates rescue operations. It prevents NGO ships from conducting multiple rescues during the search operation, and from going to the nearest port as established by maritime law but rather forcing the ships to the port assigned by the Italian navy. Failure to comply with the new rules can lead to the seizure of the ship, a fine of up to 50.000 Euro, and possible prosecution for facilitating irregular immigration. The Council of Europe sent a letter to Interior Minister Matteo Piantedosi asking for the norm to be cancelled, as it risks severely limiting rescue operations in the Mediterranean Sea.

CUTRO DECREE

This decree-law was introduced in March 2023, immediately after the shipwreck on February 26 off Cutro. That day, also due to the failure of the authorities (promptly alerted), more than 98 people, including 34 children, lost their lives; survivors were rescued by local fishermen. This was not an

isolated event, in a sea that has become the largest mass grave in the world, and under the eyes of port authorities and Frontex. The decree presents some of the most important elements of symbolic and material violence in recent years: it reduces the possibility of applying for international protection, draws up a list of safe countries to accelerate the evaluation and expulsion procedures, and reduces the possibility of having legal representation and eventually of appealing against the decision of the examining commissions. The decree also attempts to shift responsibility onto so-called smugglers (a complex issue given that many 'smugglers' are asylum seekers physically forced to operate the boats or with the promise of a lower travel cost), for whom a prison sentence of up to 24 years is possible. Therefore, after this tragic event, the authorities not only did not recognise their political and institutional responsibility (the European Union does not coordinate 'Search and Rescue' operations), but used it to introduce more repressive regulation.

CPR DECREE

Following a colonial and Israeli model, administrative detention can now be extended to 18 months. People are deprived of their liberty (d.l. 124/2023) in cases where the Territorial Commission for Asylum may give a negative outcome for the recognition of international protection or in a wide range of situations where the residence permit may be lost because the parameters for renewal cannot be met.

UNACCOMPANIED MINORS DECREE

Since October, decree No. 133/2023 introduces the possibility of detaining unaccompanied minors in adult centres and the (ab)use of invasive medical techniques for age determination – a profiling method that puts minors in a vulnerable and risky condition. The phenomenon of rising numbers of unaccompanied minors is attributed to increasingly restrictive immigration regulations and the absence of safe and regular channels of mobility.

INTERNATIONAL MANAGEMENT: THE MATTEI PLAN

The promise to ‘stop immigration’ has proven to be a racist trope and an impossible slogan to implement, for practical reasons and, above all, due to the needs of the labour market. From the formation of the Meloni government in October 2022 until December 2023, according to data from the Ministry of the Interior, arrivals increased by 50%, reaching 155.000. Neither legislative repression nor promotional campaigns, such as Meloni’s multilingual video appeal to migrants and refugees asking them not to choose Italy as a destination country, have had any real impact.

The policies adopted by the Meloni government for immigration management have shifted to the international level. There are bilateral agreements with countries of origin and transit, a request for more funds from EU institutions for the management of reception, detention, and expulsion, and a cooperation and influence plan dubbed the ‘Mattei Plan’.

TUNISIA MEMORANDUM

In 2023, Tunisia became the first departure port for migrants in transit. Despite the harsh social and economic crisis, racist statements by President Sayed, and increased violence against sub-Saharan migrants, Italy defined Tunisia as a safe country to which deportations could be carried out.

The relationship with Tunisia is determined by the need for Italy and the EU to extend control of the Central Mediterranean border. Italy promised the Tunisian prime minister 105 million Euro for controlling and detaining sub-Saharan migrants and offered to act as a mediator with the International Monetary Fund for a loan of 2 billion Euro to avoid bankruptcy, requesting in exchange spending cuts and austerity measures. Similar agreements have been signed with Turkey (2016) and Libya (2017). Between 2015 and 2022, Tunisia received between 95 and 175 million Euro for border management, according to the Openpolis Foundation (2023). The Contents of these agreements often remain opaque and frequently endorse clear human rights violations. The minutes of the Territorial Asylum Commissions contain hundreds of thousands of testimonies regarding the systematic violence that migrants and refugees suffer in the transit states with which agreements have been signed.

ALBANIA AGREEMENT

The latest bilateral agreement by the Italian government is with Albania. Ratified by the Italian Senate in February 2024, the agreement provides for the construction of two detention centres for international protection applicants on Albanian territory. This agreement raises several legal concerns regarding the respect of international asylum law and the material management of these facilities, which should be subject to Italian law. With this model of outsourcing the management of migration flows, the right of refugees to legal assistance and linguistic mediation is significantly reduced, as is the possibility of monitoring the centres by human rights associations.

MATTEI PLAN, COOPERATION, NEOCOLONIALISM

The ‘Mattei Plan’ sets aside 5.5 billion Euro to build partnership relations between Italy and African states. These resources will be partly taken from the climate fund and partly from the cooperation and development fund. It draws its name from Enrico Mattei, founder of the ENI energy company.

On the surface, this represents a shift from the predatory approach that has characterised Western dealings with African countries. The prime minister has repeatedly stated that the plan aims at Italy’s energy independence by favouring a fair relationship with African countries. This is not exactly what the Italian multinational ENI is doing in countries like Niger³² or in extraction and exploitation programs by European multinationals under the ‘green’ label. Even the President of the African Union Commission, Faki Mousa Mahamat, denounced the top-down construction of the process, highlighting the absence of consultation with African countries. Furthermore, the event on January 4, 2024, recorded the non-participation of countries such as Burkina Faso, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria.

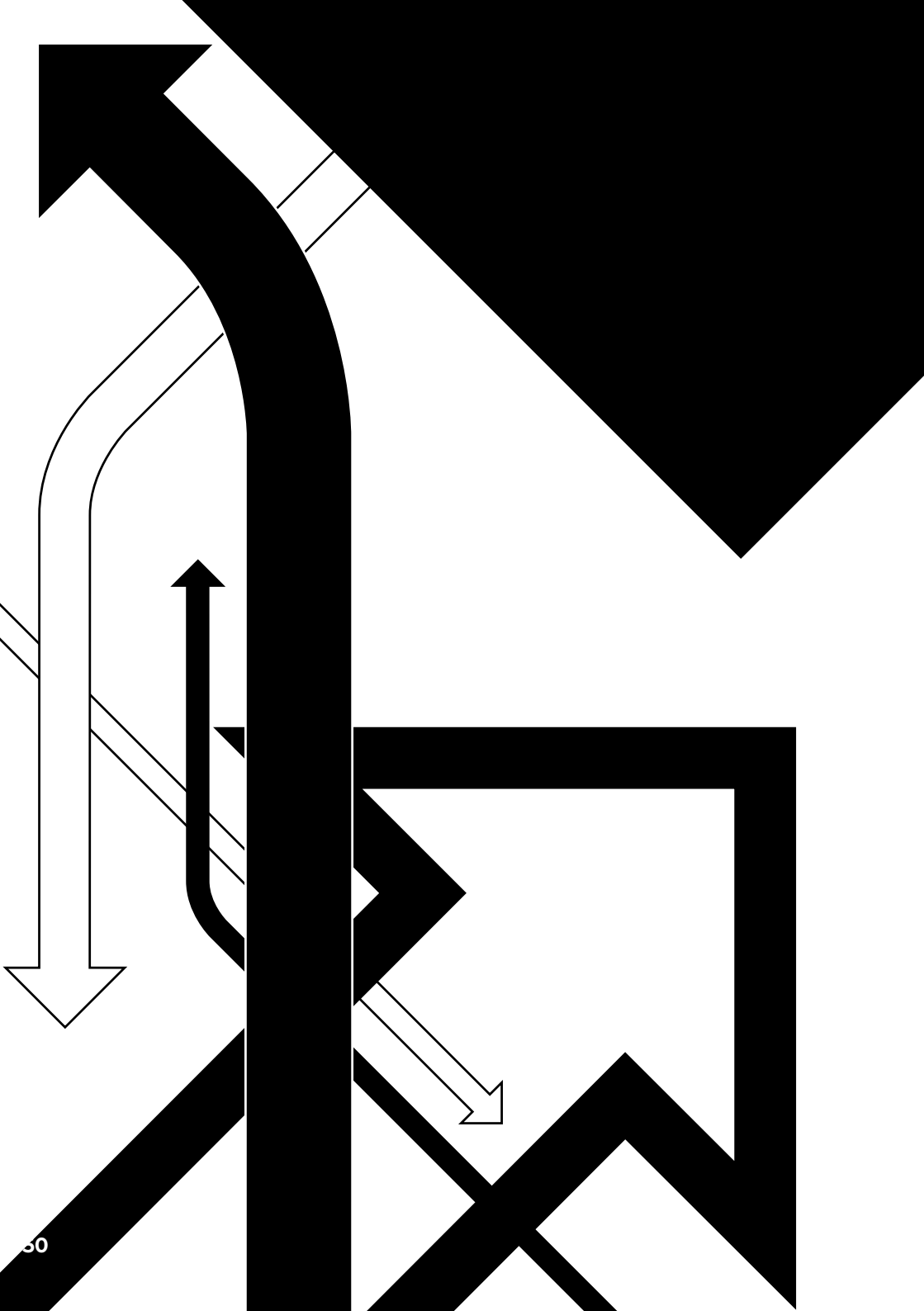
CONCLUSIONS

On September 23, 2023, Giorgia Meloni admitted for the first time the government’s difficulty in managing immigration: ‘I hoped for better on immigration. We have worked a lot, but the results are not what we hoped to see. It is a very complex problem, but I am sure we will overcome it. But this issue deserves a second phase’. Although propaganda and the almost

exclusive use of public information services have attempted to construct a 'pragmatic', simple, and very direct narrative regarding the reforms needed by the country, the real situation tells us otherwise. Immigration, as a social phenomenon due to causes such as extreme poverty, armed conflicts, and climatic and environmental disasters (direct effects of a neo-colonial capitalist production system), cannot be stopped, and it will be dehumanised and exploited by the Italian economic system to extract profit.

The condition of lacking documents and thus confinement in a legal status of illegality is one of the most blatant examples of a social hierarchy of citizenship that directly responds to the needs of the labour market. The increase in the cost of goods and energy and the technical recession of the eurozone in 2023 make it increasingly clear that the politicians will not intervene in protecting migrant labour as it would immediately harm key sectors in the Italian economy, such as agriculture, catering, construction, and personal services, sectors that historically make extensive use of atypical contracts and informal and precarious labour. Migrants and refugees without documents, made invisible, and confined in ghettos are the new damned of the earth, no longer just a reserve army, but a dehumanised segment on which small and large businesses base their survival.

The Meloni government's policies and attempts to create alliances with leaders like Sounak, Rama, and Sayed, represent a model of migration management based on repression, violation of human rights, reduction of protections for international refugee applicants, and collective pushbacks to unsafe third countries.



UNITED KINGDOM

‘STOP THE BOATS!’: THE POLITICAL FOOTBALL OF THE ‘IMMIGRATION DEBATE’

By Joti Brar

HOW THE RULING CLASS DIVIDES WORKERS AGAINST ONE ANOTHER AND DISTRACTS OUR ATTENTION FROM THE TRUE CAUSES OF OUR MISERY.

In Britain, as in every other imperialist country today, there is an increasingly heated and vitriolic debate around the question of immigration. The more that living standards for British workers fall, the louder and more insistent this debate becomes.

While some debate is focused on the relatively larger numbers of migrants who come legally to study and work (a proportion of whom then go on to become ‘illegal’ by overstaying their visa limits), the majority of hysteria is centred on the small minority of migrants who have *arrived* in Britain via ‘illegal’ means from the beginning – very often in the hope of claiming asylum once they get here.

As legal methods of entry for asylum seekers using official international mechanisms have been choked off³³, a significant number of refugees are forced to travel by dangerous underground routes. In the last few years, a clamp-down on alternative means of entry has led to an increase in the number of migrants arriving on small boats³⁴ across the English Channel. According to the Refugee Council³⁵: ‘The majority of people crossing the Channel in small boats are fleeing war-torn or oppressive countries where *no safe and formal routes exist* for making an asylum claim in the UK.’ Four in ten who cross the Channel come from just five countries – Afghanistan, Iran, Syria, Eritrea, and Sudan – which currently have asylum grant rates of between 82 and 98 per cent.

Despite the fact that so many who come by boat are genuine refugees who can find no other way to make an asylum claim, the much-publicised shift

in their method of entry has been used to justify a further ratcheting up of the heat surrounding the topic of immigration, and to the promotion of the demand to ‘Stop the boats!’³⁶

A DROP IN THE OCEAN

To put this rhetoric in context, the population of Great Britain is around 65 million people, most of it centred in the southeast and central areas of England. The number of migrants coming to Britain on small boats, around whom so much incendiary debate has been centred, is thought to have been less than 50,000 at its peak two years ago³⁷. Available statistics show this number falling considerably since November 2021. Last year, the number is thought to have been around 30,000³⁸.

Official statistics are often sketchy and incomplete, and government methodology has recently changed, making comparisons difficult, but official figures indicate that the number of migrants arriving in Britain via legal channels from outside the European Union has been rising since Brexit, alongside a parallel movement of European workers out of the country³⁹. There have been particularly large spikes in visas for students (as deregulated universities seek to maximise their income by actively recruiting overseas students and charging them astronomical international fees) and for skilled workers (who have been asked to plug gaps in the British workforce, as it is cheaper to use labour trained elsewhere than to educate and train skilled workers at home).

In terms of the number of *asylum* applications per head of population, the UK ranks 22nd in Europe⁴⁰ (just eight per 10,000 of the population, as against 23 for Germany)⁴¹, despite being one of the richest counties in the region (and the world), and despite its obligations under the Geneva conventions. In contrast to the deliberately ‘hostile environment’⁴² that greets most asylum seekers to Britain, however, more than 200,000 applicants from Hong Kong⁴³ and Ukraine⁴⁴ have had their claims *expedited* in the last three years – clearly because their admission was in line with propaganda supporting British imperialist aggression against China and Russia. As a result of having safe legal channels through which to claim asylum in the UK, none of these Ukrainian or Chinese migrants had to risk the dangers of (or pay the fees for) a small-boat Channel crossing.

Since most migrants to Britain have homes to go to and are permitted to work,

they quickly become invisible, merging into the workforce, sending their children to local schools, etc. The treatment of migrants who arrive by illegal means, by contrast, makes their presence much more noticeable to the local populations amongst whom they are housed, although their absolute numbers remain small. In 2019, just 0.6 percent of the population consisted of people who had come to Britain as an asylum seeker⁴⁵. Over half of these had been living in the country for more than 15 years, putting into context the alarmist notion that Britain has been inundated by a recent ‘flood’ of such people.

What can *appear to be* ‘significant numbers’ of unprocessed asylum seekers are routinely placed in extremely impoverished ‘post-industrial’ communities of low employment and high social deprivation. In this context, where education, healthcare, and housing provisions, along with other social services and community facilities, have been cut to the bone and are now totally inadequate for the needs of the population, even the presence of a fairly small number of immigrants in a run-down hotel can easily be made to seem inflammatory.

The system of placing asylum seekers in neglected areas, denying them the right to work, and keeping them dependent on beggarly hand-outs (£7 per day for all expenses) while their applications are bogged down in a process that might take years, can be and regularly is used as an excuse to drum up outrage about ‘scroungers’ and to whip up pogroms based on supposed ‘threats’ to local women and children. The fear of Asian and African men, in particular, has been stoked by decades of dehumanising Islamophobic propaganda that has accompanied British imperialist aggression against the people of Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Iran, Palestine, Yemen, and elsewhere.

ELECTION YEAR BIDDING WAR UNDERWAY

It is an accepted trope amongst bourgeois commentators that migration controls are a ‘demand’ that *originates spontaneously* amongst the poorer members of the working class and that in making this demand, workers must be acting from an inherent racist backwardness. Politicians, so the story goes, then find themselves compelled to act on this demand in order to placate the public. The fact that three generations of workers have been endlessly informed that immigration is the cause of their problems while their living standards declined is left out of this convenient narrative.

Media from the reactionary *Sun*⁴⁶ tabloid newspaper to the liberal *Guardian*⁴⁷,

politicians from the left wing of the Labour party as well as the right wing of the Tory party all routinely agree that ‘something must be done’, and the only real question is *exactly what form* anti-immigrant measures should take.

As an adjunct to this process, the entire debate is endlessly shifted to the right by steady normalisation of openly fascist approaches to the poor of the world. On the one hand, the constant stream of anti-immigrant hysteria in the ‘mainstream’ press and from ‘mainstream’ politicians normalises the idea that immigration is a big problem. This gives fuel to the rabid utterings of the fascist right wing, who merely take these talking points to their logical extreme. On the other hand, the ‘mainstream’ justifies the constant shifting of its discourse to the right by claiming that if it doesn’t, it will lose ground to open fascists. By means of this carefully choreographed ballet, the fascist discourse and most overt institutional racism are increasingly presented as ‘normal’.

As the 2024 general election approaches, Britain’s political parties are mired in a new version of the same old bidding war. In the 1960s, the Tory party scared voters with the slogan ‘If you want a nigger for a neighbour, vote Labour’ and Labour in government responded by instituting virginity tests for Asian brides⁴⁸. In the more recent past, the Labour government of Tony Blair built detention centres (prisons) on British soil in which asylum seekers, including young children, continue to be held for unlimited periods in horrendous conditions while their claims are processed⁴⁹.

Today, not only are some asylum seekers being returned to countries through which they have transited without their claim even being assessed by Britain⁵⁰, but the remainder are being threatened with a third-country processing regime that Britain’s supreme court has ruled as unlawful and the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) has condemned as a violation of Britain’s international responsibilities⁵¹.

As this article was being written, the present Tory government was passing new legislation through Parliament that aims to offshore the asylum process altogether by paying a designated third country (Rwanda)⁵² to assess asylum claims from afar and to offer successful applicants a home there rather than allowing them to come to Britain⁵³. The morning after the Rwanda bill was passed through Parliament (Monday 22 April), news came in of yet another disaster in the Channel. Five of the 112 people on board an overcrowded

boat had fallen overboard and drowned – three men, one woman, and a seven-year-old girl⁵⁴. While shedding crocodile tears for this entirely preventable tragedy and claiming to be acting from motives of ‘compassion’, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak used the news as an opportunity to present the new legislation as a ‘solution’ that will create an atmosphere of ‘deterrence’. According to the logic of Sunak and his government, deaths at sea are not the result of refugees having no safe or legal routes through which to apply for asylum in Britain but are entirely the result of the unscrupulousness of the human trafficking operations that organise the boats.

WHAT IS THIS REALLY ALL ABOUT?

It is clear that people will continue to be forced to leave their homes to escape wars, hunger, and other crises that threaten their existence. These problems – war, underdevelopment, and impoverishment – have their roots in imperialist exploitation and domination; no government measure can ‘stem the tide’ of mass migration around the globe without addressing these root causes.

So what is the real purpose and actual effect of the refugee policy of Britain’s government? Clearly, it seeks merely to divert attention from the failings of the capitalist-imperialist system, under which the oldest imperialist country, which remains one of the largest hubs of accumulated wealth in the world, is unable to provide a decent living for a large and growing proportion of its people.

The concepts of ‘real’ versus ‘bogus’ asylum-seekers, and the distinction between ‘legal’ and ‘illegal’ immigrants are not actually aimed at stemming immigration flows but at reinforcing the myth that immigrants are the cause of British workers’ poverty, and that our rulers are trying to protect us from these ‘invaders’. Anti-immigration legislation and its associated public debates and punitive enforcement mechanisms aim to tie British-born workers to their own ruling class and to divide them from their fellow workers. This is particularly clear when one realises how small a proportion even of ‘illegal’ migration to Britain will be affected since most ‘illegals’ in Britain entered the country on a student or tourism visa and stayed on without permission. Clearly, the Rwanda bill cannot possibly have any effect on this, by far the largest, number of ‘illegal’ migrants in Britain.

It is worthwhile noting here that the welfare-state concessions made to British workers in the special period after WW2, the loss of which we are now told

is owing not to a shift in the balance of class forces or the return of the global overproduction crisis but to an ‘impossible strain’ caused by ‘too many immigrants’, were largely funded through the *increased exploitation of Britain’s colonies* – a fact tacitly understood and accepted by labour movement leaders.

The capitalists of Britain benefit greatly from the existence of an intimidated ‘illegal’ migrant workforce, which puts very little demand on the state machinery but contributes mightily (through its slave-labour pay and conditions) to capitalist profit margins, enabling rates of super-exploitation usually only available in the oppressed countries.

Mass migration in the modern world is a phenomenon that has been entirely created by the activities of global capital – in particular by the financiers’ need for a cheap and mobile workforce that can be brought to wherever it is needed. The first mass migrations in Britain took place from the countryside to the newly-forming industrial cities. The next wave came from Britain’s Irish colony. Throughout the 19th century, ‘excess’ European populations were transported to settle and control its ‘new world’ colonies. After WW2, large numbers of workers were moved from poor colonies to the imperial heartlands to reinforce the supply of cheap labour as the demand for labour-power was increasing.

Since so much of the world’s wealth has been transferred to Britain, it is inevitable that people will migrate from their ravaged homelands in search of the decent living that has been denied to them by imperialist looting. Those countries in the oppressed world that try to keep their wealth where it is – by nationalising their core industries, for example – routinely find themselves targeted by imperialist war or sanctions (or both). This inevitably creates a further flow of refugees and asylum seekers as the infrastructure and economy of entire countries are laid waste by economic strangulation, B-1 bombers, and depleted uranium rounds.

Divisive immigration legislation and the racism necessary to legitimize and pass it weaken our ranks and create a super-exploited underclass. This process exclusively benefits the rich, the multinational companies, and right-wing parties. The laws and their reactionary breeding ground need to be exposed and opposed in every country and internationally. ‘Workers of the World unite’ remains our dictum.⁵⁵

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'If all the world's migrants lived in one country, it would be the fourth largest in the world. Migration is widespread beyond the borders of Europe, but - because of a long history of racist disparagement of people from other continents - the issue of migration to Europe has captivated the world. This short document deepens our conversations about migration, imperialism, and the path forward.'

Vijay Prashad

Denmark, Poland, Switzerland, Germany, UK, France, and Italy exemplify the European states' opportunistic and deceitful approach to asylum, refugees, and migration.