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Global Migration

- Features -

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From the middle of the 20th century, migration has been a decisive political issue. International organizations estimate that the number of people moving within and across national borders has grown to greater extent than ever since World War II. These type of estimates are never neutral – how far, and under which circumstances, do you have to move to be counted as a migrant, for instance? It is the same with statistics; you always have to make some qualification.

Nevertheless, very comprehensive movements of populations take place in different regions of the world. This is very often due to structural economic changes and to inequality. For instance, South Africa and Angola attract migrants from poorer neighbouring countries, as do Argentina and Venezuela in Latin America and Australia and Japan in East and Southeast Asia. The Gulf States in the Middle East attract large number of migrants from East Africa, Turkey, the Indian subcontinent and the Philippines.

In public debate in Denmark, you get the impression that migration primarily happens from the Global South to the Global North. But two thirds of international migration is regional, while only one third is from poorer countries in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and Asia towards the USA and Europe. Most of this migration comes from former colonies of those states.

At the same time, permanent relocation is happening because of wars, particularly in Syria, Iraq, Eritrea, and Afghanistan. Drought, floods and other climatic disasters force millions to leave their homes. The vast majority go to neighbouring countries. Urbanization is a decisive reason, too, for permanent movements of people. In China just now the largest relocation is of people from rural to urban areas.

Causes of migration

Migration is a persistent social phenomenon and a major political issue, among other things because migrants have been the target of racist campaigns all around the world. The double challenge for the left is to fight racism, and support migrants organizing – including through self-organization, as well generally, for instance in the trade-union movement – to strengthen the working class in general.

Inequality and poverty within countries regionally, and between North and South is one of the dynamics which make people migrate. With the exception of situations where people are forced to leave their homes, for instance because of war, the movement of people generally follows the movement of capital. In terms of rural to urban-migration, regional movement and also international movement, people generally move to where they think (better) economic possibilities are available.

Power structures, which were globally established with capitalism, live on in new forms. Those in power retain and extend their privileges. Multinational corporations – often with support from national political élites – ruthlessly exploit nature and people to maximize their profit, creating dreadful conditions for people all over the world.

Rich states in the West, but increasingly also in Asia, create unstable conditions in the countries from which people migrate, through militarization and economic exploitation. But they do not want to take responsibility for those migrants who subsequently arrive in their countries as a result of their actions.

There are many causes of migration, and there are many different starting points for migrating safely, arriving safely, as there are different prospects in the country you arrive in, or opportunities to plan where to move and settle next. Some people flee in a hurry from bombs or the destruction of their land, while others move to get a job. These different conditions affect people's needs where they arrive, and on their journey, and what opportunities they have to organize and improve their situation. The left – and especially the trade union-movement – have to realize how to work for migrants' interests, and how to strengthen migrants' opportunities to improve their own situation. Obviously this does not apply to those migrants who move to top positions in multinational corporations – it is not a task for the left to organize or defend those people.

The option of migration is greatly influenced by your class position. The bourgeoisie rarely have a problems to move safely and freely, get rights where they do, or are less dependent on those rights. Workers hardly ever have this freedom of movement. The bourgeoisie is rarely a victim of racism, or is affected by it less. The crises of capitalism – economic, social, political, climatic – create a shortage of work, the destruction of nature, social crises, political persecution, famine, and death. It reduces people's prospects and conditions of life, and forces people to migrate.

To maximize profits, and to play off workers against each other, employers always make use of differences in working conditions and wages. Often this happens in local areas, but also regionally, or between countries. Capital exploits cheap labour directly, or uses it to undermine locally obtained agreements, and lower wages. This happens in more or less planned ways, and is not new. It may be intensified under certain conditions, as when people are forced to migrate, or when laws and rules are favourable for the employers.

We want an end the causes which *force* people to migrate, but a situation where all people can really choose where they live is a very distant project. In fact, many things show that the crises of capitalism pressurize even more people to migrate. So migration is an important phenomenon, which we have to take an attitude to, to take a clear political position which involves real solutions.

The History of Racism

Racism has assumed many shapes throughout history and covers broad forms of oppression against a background of ethnicity and appearance/skin color, but also is often linked to certain cultures, or religions. Racism in its present forms is closely entangled with class society, where sections of the population throughout history have been racialized as part of the legitimation of class exploitation and slavery.

Many racist narratives which persist in our society today originate from colonialism, and the specific racist ideologies which supported it.

Today capitalism still takes advantage of the splits, the hierarchies, and various forms of repression, based on racialization. The division of labour is not only gendered, but also racialized, globally and locally. In addition, racism is still able to legitimate imperialism, global inequality and war, and to hide structural problems in the capitalist mode of production, such as economic crises, or structural economic inequality (globally and locally). Under these circumstances, racism works as an efficient diversion.

The growth of racism in Europe – and scare scenarios from the right

The inherent racism in society provided a basis for hostility and prejudice against people who came to Denmark in the 1960's as migrant workers (or 'guest workers', as they were officially called) from Pakistan and Turkey for example. To comply with demand for particularly unskilled labour, these workers were offered work permits.

Prejudice and xenophobia became a seriously dangerous political phenomenon when the division between 'them' and 'us' was connected to social issues as unemployment and housing shortage. In the 1980's, racist gangs of youths, the 'greencoats', violently attacked migrants.

In some cases the trade unions did not deal with new and potentially new members positively. As early as the beginning of the 20th century, the Danish trade union movement developed a tradition of arguing for 'Danish jobs for Danish workers', when unemployment in certain sectors increased, as it for instance happened to the so-called 'beet-Poles' in the 1910's, and later over factory work from the middle of the 1970's. However, forces, who fought for organizing those who arrived in Denmark from other countries, have always existed (since 2000, trade unions, in the construction sector among others, have developed this practice).

From the 1970's, the Fremskridtspartiet (Progress Party), and afterwards other political parties, also started demanding an end to immigration, especially from so-called 'muslim countries', and the expulsion of migrants. The 1980's and the first half of the 1990's were characterized by high unemployment, and therefore were a favourable time to found the Dansk Folkeparti (Danish People's Party), which resulted in the end of the ultra liberal Fremskridtspartiet. DF created an image of a party willing and able to safeguard the conditions of 'the ordinary Dane' by limiting migration, and worsening conditions for those they did not define as Danish. So DF's right wing-populism created the idea that you could refer to migrant and refugees as a 'source for financing' every time some politician or expert claims that further cuts in public expenditure are necessary. This 'put our own people first' approach can only work, if there is a distinct split between 'us' and 'the others'. 'The others' have increasingly been defined as 'the muslims'.

This development is not unique to Denmark; right wing and anti-immigration parties emerged in other European countries. This approach, where migrants and refugees are seen as a threat, has to a different extent been taken on board by most political parties, and influences public debate, where prejudice about 'the others' is continuously repeated and confirmed. We now see a kind of racism that argues that Christian/Western values are civilized and a basis for democracy, while 'their' values are reactionary and undemocratic.

In the same way, femonationalism and homonationalism have evolved, where it is claimed that the oppression of women and LGBT people only exists amongst 'foreigners' (the muslims). Femonationalism does not imply a common struggle for freedom, but sees the state as a protector of 'poor' women from 'foreign' men. The 24-years rule for example restricts the possibilities of young people marrying a foreign subject. [\[1\]](#)

This political debate, where persons with a migrant background are demonized and described as a threat, plays a major part in legitimizing the racism expressed in everyday life, such as vandalism against asylum centres and violent attacks.

Denmark and the EU's refugee and migration policies

In 1973, Denmark stopped work permits for those from countries outside the European common market and Scandinavia. In 1983 the right to family reunion was extended, and so-called 'de facto' refugees got residence permits. However, these rights have been attacked as the rules have been tightened several times since 1994.

Some of the most drastic changes try to prevent refugees getting to Denmark at all. Once asylum applicants could get on a plane and say that they wanted to apply for asylum when they arrived. The imposition of visa requirements for entry into Denmark and putting responsibility on the transporting company (passed in 1986, imposed in 1989), where airlines can be fined heavily for carrying passengers without a valid visa, eliminated this opportunity. In 2002, the opportunity to apply for asylum at a Danish consulate abroad was also abolished.

Through the Dublin and Schengen conventions, migration rules for have become common across the EU. The Red-Green Alliance and SAP opposed Schengen from the beginning, because the removal of border control between Schengen countries mean those countries had common rules for entry. The common information system means that activists, for instance, considered persona non grata in one Schengen country, are banned from entering any Schengen country. In relation to refugees, the Schengen countries, we we see from the Danish example, chose a policy of keeping refugees and migrants out. If instead Denmark should pioneer receiving refugees, it would demand an exit from Schengen.

Furthermore, the Dublin convention imposed the principle of 'first safe country', meaning that refugees have to be registered in the first EU country they arrive in, and their asylum application is dealt with there. So refugees can only apply for asylum in Denmark if they enter the country illegally.

EU's border agency, Frontex, established in 2004, is changing from a force which cooperates over border control to an independent agency, which it is planned will operate autonomously. So far the agency has a budget for 2016 of 1.8 million Danish kroner, and will draw on military resources from the member countries and NATO for its operations. It is an expression of a militarization of the borders of the EU to keep refugees out. It goes against the efforts during the Italian Mare Nostrum of 2013-2014, where salvage operations rescued the lives of about 100.000 people, before it was closed down because of lack of resources. Ten thousands of refugees are drowning in the Mediterranean as a result of the totally mistaken and inhumane border policy of the EU. People smugglers have emerged solely as a response to the demand created by border controls.

The effort from the EU to keep refugees out also means agreements with oppressive regimes to prevent refugees coming to the EU borders. Previously the Libyan dictator, Gaddafi, was rewarded for this effort, and now Erdogan has committed to take refugees back, who happened to be lucky enough to cross the sea to a Greek island. A huge political and diplomatic effort is being made to to keep refugees outside the EU, as well as comprehensive police and military means.

Instead the effort ought to be about ensuring people running away have decent and safe conditions.

In the first place it is about:

- establishing safe routes for flight
- the right of refugees to organize and to be acknowledged as a community
- decent conditions for asylum applicants and migrants, regardless of status
- the same access to social benefits as others living in Denmark
- increasing the number of permanent rescue permits rather than temporary rescue permits. temporary rescue permits leave people in an uncertain position. People who flee from war for instance, should be allowed themselves to decide when it is safe to return home.

The relevance of social dumping to the labour market in Denmark

Schengen means that there is no passport control when you cross borders.. This is not the same as the right to live and work in other Schengen countries. The EU primarily guarantees that persons can move to work.

The EU is used as an instrument to oppress workers over wages and working conditions. The free movement of goods means that capital can threaten to move production to those countries where costs are lowest. This creates not only a pressure on wages, but also on taxes, environmental legislation, etc. From the angle of capital production, costs are always kept down. If it is not possible to move production – e.g. some services, and construction – the solution is moving labour between countries. Since the foundation of the EU, the aim has been to introduce free movement of labour services, as for goods and capital. Free movement for labour was, however, not extended before the early 90's. The 2006 Service Directive is meant to guarantee that companies can sell services in other countries. With the creation of European Union citizenship through the Maastricht-treaty, citizens in the EU have the right to reside in other EU countries. [2] This right is, however, limited in terms of prolonged residences; you need to have a job or other means to support yourself.

The way the EU opens up migration of workers between the EU countries predominantly happens on the employers' terms. It is not a problem when individual workers from EU countries look for jobs in other EU countries. But it is a problem when companies specifically recruit labour from places where living conditions are worse, leading to undermining of agreements, and other protections of decent working conditions. The same is true, when factories based in poorer EU-countries specialize in the export of cheap labour. This is one of many forms of social dumping.

But despite the fact that the debate on social dumping in the trade unions and amongst the public is very often entirely concerned with 'foreign workers', there are several other forms of social dumping. Any social condition can be applied to squeeze or put pressure on wages and conditions: young workers, people with less education or training only for other jobs, women, newly qualified people – in the same way as people without citizenship in the country where they are working.

In relation to sale of services abroad, the service directive says that “*demands on service workers, set up in another EU/EEA country, can only be based on the grounds of public order, public security, public health, and/or protection of the environment*”. It is no coincidence that protection of workers' rights is not mentioned. On the contrary, the Laval judgment from 2007 shows that the right of union organisation is undermined. The European Court of Justice made it clear that the right of the Latvian firm to provide services in Sweden trumped the rights of of the Swedish Construction Workers' Union to organise effectively.

Some consider migration of labour as a form of equalization of solidarity between the richer and poorer countries. No one forces migrants to take up employment; they may do it because the alternative is worse. No doubt workers take up employment in other countries in the hope for better conditions for themselves, or their families. But they are often disappointed with the conditions they achieve, but then it is hard to give up and return to home. It is simply much easier to oppress and over-exploit workers, who are in unfamiliar social surroundings, with a limited network, and perhaps insufficient language skills to understand the context in which they are now in. It does not necessarily make it more difficult to organize people – but it makes particular demands on the ways you do it. When the unions succeed in organizing foreign workers or other groups with specific conditions, is it, broadly speaking, when they have made a systematic effort.

The increased opening of the movement of labour by the EU is seen in the fact that, according to statistics the number of foreign citizens employed in Denmark has risen from 230,000 in 2008 to 335,000 in 2016. Of this increase of 105,000, EU citizens make up 85,000.

This means potentially 335,000 new members for the trade union-movement. Regrettably, this is not always the way people talk about those who migrate in order to work. It is our task on the left to raise this perspective. Most foreign workers are employed in cleaning and other service occupations, followed by industry and hotels/restaurants, and also building and construction. This means that the task of organizing particularly lies with unions such as 3F (mostly unskilled workers in the private sector, and some in the public sector) and FOA (workers from the public sector – health, nursing, caring, cooking, cleaning, teaching, etc.)

This is only a small part of total of migration, which is expressed in the employers' attempt to impose sweating. When all is said and done, not all sweating is related to migrant workers. In hotels and restaurants, many young people and students are hired under uncertain conditions without agreements. The problem is not the number of migrants, but when migration takes place on the employers' conditions – and when the trade union-movement fails to organize them.

For a refugee policy based on solidarity

The Red-Green Alliance has a clear view in relation to refugees; that Denmark, as a rich state, has to make an effort over those millions of people fleeing for their lives. This means increased economic support to improve conditions for those living in refugee camps. It also means that Denmark ought to raise the number of 'quotas refugees' and ease the rules for asylum and humanitarian residence permits instead of tightening them up.

If we won a political majority in Denmark and pursued a refugee policy based on solidarity, this might set an example to others. When all is said and done, it is not an impossible task for the rich countries to guarantee all those seeking refuge decent conditions of life. The debate about the so-called refugee problem in Europe hides the fact that the vast majority of refugees of the world flee to neighbouring countries, themselves poor in some cases also ravaged by war or crisis. The number of refugees arriving in Europe is negligible on a global level.

In recent years, we have seen organizing around refugees and migration. In Denmark 'kirkeasyl' (church asylum) was a concrete organizing focus to defend Iraqi asylum applicants. The organizing includes concrete solidarity with the collection of their material need, people to guard them in the church and mass mobilisations, where 20-25.000 people gathered to demonstration or support concert. 'Kirkeasyl' began with 15 asylum seekers asking for church asylum in Vor Frue Church [\[3\]](#), later on they were joined by others. Self-organizing between refugees and asylum activists was extended.

In 2015, we saw hundreds of thousands of refugees arriving in Europe via 'the Balkan-route', to the Greek islands or crossing the Mediterranean and setting out for northern Europe. When this undermining of the Dublin convention is possible, it is because the states in southern Europe had no interest in keeping the refugees back, as they, by the way, were supposed to. Equally, it was conditioned by the fact that the refugees themselves fought to move to the countries where they want to go.

A massive solidarity movement emerged to 'welcome' refugees in several European countries. This led to the spontaneous establishing of local and international networks and organisations to assist refugees. This was expressed in different ways in the circumstances in different countries. In Italy, Germany, Belgium, and others, camps emerged, and together with migrants themselves activists coordinated transport, food, clothes, medicine, and legal advice.

Movements emerged making political demands, organizing giant demonstrations all over Europe. In Denmark, ten thousands went onto the streets several times, and concrete activism and assistance to refugees was coordinated.

People took part in organizing and distributing support, paid for out of people's own pockets. People gave clothes, food, tickets, medicine, provided cars and boats. 'Venligboerne' (something like 'friendly neighbours') was one of the ways it was expressed. Even though Venligboerne stated they wished to remain apolitical, there is a great potential in politicizing this movement.

In several waves, initiatives emerged spontaneously to meet internationally to strengthen coordination and make claims for asylum. In many places the left was a central part in the structuring of these movements, taking initiatives, and giving political perspectives. This is exactly our task; to enter organically into these organisations, strengthen them, and bring them forward. This was an example of a movement, which concretely coordinated international solidarity to put in political claims, and it is the greatest antiracist movement in recent times.

A refugee policy based on solidarity has to include:

- The right and option to apply for asylum and in whatever country the person wants.
- That the rich countries in the world take a much higher quota of refugees, for example by making international agreements that, in the light of the current refugee situation, the rich countries increase the number of refugees they accept to 1 p.c. of the population
- Frontex should be abolished and safe routes for those who want to apply for asylum must be established
- Withdraw from the Dublin convention. End the responsibility of the transport companies
- Massive support of refugees in the countries/areas near to their countries of origin
- End the present inhumane deportations
- Close refugee camps. Refugees to be given decent homes, easy access to healthcare and access to social and cultural support
- Strategies against social dumping and to promote organizing of migrants
- We fight the way that migrants are used by employers to undermine union and social rights. Cause and effect cut both ways. When employers reduce working conditions, they have to recruit their workers abroad. So we can see that it is deregulation of the labour market itself, which creates some migration, not migration alone which creates social dumping.

Our starting point is that it is through the workers' own struggle that decent working conditions are secured. The trade union movement will often be the primary force leading this struggle, but it has to be conducted at various levels. In relation to state regulation, the trade union movement has to make demands, but political parties must also defend union and social rights. The struggle has to be conducted against the employers through fighting for good agreements. At each individual place of work, especially at those workplaces without agreements, or which have in poorer conditions in other ways, the trade union movement has to first of all support organizing on the ground and a fight for better conditions.

It is important to provide material in people's first languages – e.g. when organizing Polish builders. It is also useful to cooperate with the trade-union movement in the countries from which the migrant workers come. The self-organization of migrant workers must be supported, and other solidarity initiatives may also be important. In Southern Italy for an example, migrant workers in tomato plantations have struggled for decent wages and working conditions. Against the background of those struggles, an alternative means of production on self-organized

plantations, including the production of tomato sauce, has emerged.

Organizing migrants and fighting social dumping means putting forward at least the following demands in the trade union movement

- Dealing with the issue of social dumping in terms of unequal pay for equal work, not as something limited to ethnicity or citizenship.
- Taking the initiative to promote the self-organization of migrants and support their demands.
- Taking the necessary initiatives to ensure the participation of migrants at all levels of the movement, and in all activities
- Develop an international body of unions, where membership can be transferred from one country to another.
- Legal union protection against social dumping, in the form of chain responsibility, social clauses, and universalizing relevant aspects

At the EU level we should struggle for:

- The introduction of a social protocol stating that free movement cannot be applied to undermine union rights.
- The Posted Worker Directive should be changed, so that collective agreements have to apply and that these workers must be given decent housing conditions
- Chain responsibility, so that the main contractor is responsible for the upholding of collective agreements.

In relation to migrants who seek permanent residence in a country, they should have full rights or they will become a vulnerable underclass. In countries, such as France, where there are large groups of sans papiers, without legal protection, it is an important struggle for them to get papers, and so full rights. We also fight for democratic rights, so that nobody is shut out from political participation. As a starting point, everyone must have the right to vote in at least one country as part of the fight for easier access to citizenship.

The tasks of the left

Our task is to evolve answers, building on solidarity, anti racism, and defence of the working class and oppressed groups. Because of this we are working to influence the Red-Green Alliance and SUF (Socialist Youth Front). Our priority is organizing and to promote struggles for rights. In individual workplaces and in the labour market generally, we fight for common organizing, and against divisions between different sectors of workers.

We also support self-organization of the specially oppressed such as women and migrants. The trade-union movement sometimes 'forgets' these groups, or does not accept that they are discriminated against. Even the left doesn't have a good record of organizing migrants nor supporting the self-organizing of migrant groups. We need to see this as a strategic challenge to the left and the labour movement.

We have to be open to the need to evolve new organizational forms for this task. If we can overcome these challenges, this will potentially strengthen the left and strengthen of the working class. It is on basis of organizing and

struggles that we will develop demands over different levels of state regulations, including EU directives, and international agreements.

State regulations, however, cannot be an alternative or a shortcut to protection against social dumping, for example. This is partly because we cannot rely on either the Danish state or the EU to defend the interests of the working class, no matter how legislation is framed.

The law never is sufficient in itself. History has proved this several times. In the 1960's and the 1970's, legislation was passed, as a result of pressure from the trade-union movement, to guarantee that foreign workers were covered by agreements – but this did not stop foreign workers getting worse wages and conditions, just as the so-called halt to immigration did not stop immigration either.

Nobody should be surprised by this – an agreement alone is not sufficient to guarantee the real conditions in a workplace. You need union organization and individual workers knowing their rights and being prepared to defend them collectively every day. We work to get the trade-union movement to prioritize strengthening local organizing and activity – and that organization is regardless of the workers' legal relations with the state.

Migrants, including undocumented ones, have a common interest with citizens of a country where they work, in fighting to improve wages and working conditions. But people come to this fight from different positions, and the left and the unions must take these differences in account. There are no easy answers to the creative ways with which capital exploits workers, globally and a locally To defend our rights and improve our conditions as workers – no matter where in the world we work, and how far we have moved to get a job – demands persistent organizing and a united fight.

Adopted by the National Committee of SAP, Denmark, February 28th, 2017

[1] The rule states that a foreign subject cannot be granted a residence permit and thereby get family reunification, with a danish partner by marriage if either of them are under 24 years old.

[2] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Citiz...>

[3] In 2009, in Copenhagen, Denmark.