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Migration Dossier

Migration: Complete control

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As the [last issue of IV](#) made clear, immigration was a central topic of discussion at the European Council meeting in Seville on June 21-22, 2002 - on both sides of the barricades. The governments of the European Union want to develop common policies that aim to give them complete control of those who can enter the continent - even if this means that thousands will die elsewhere because of war, torture or starvation. They plan to use their navies and armies to police this Fortress.

[https://npa31.org/IMG/jpg/10_refugees.jpg]

For those who manage to slip through their defences and are caught, the punishment is increasingly draconian. People whose only 'crime' is to flee the worst ravages of neo-liberalism are imprisoned in camps and detention centres. People are taken in the middle of the night and put on planes in secret so that protestors cannot prevent this inhumanity.

Those who escape even this inner defence are also condemned. Without rights, they are left to eke out a desperate existence, subject to poverty, to extreme insecurity at work (because their work is clandestine) and to racism in every sphere of life.

Those who hold up capitalist globalisation as the model of a world without inequality, without want, without classes are the very ones who also show in practice that this is no more than a mirage. When people want to come to Europe, they say that we are full up, there is no room at the inn or the table....

Even though the Seville summit did not reach final agreement on all the punitive measures it considered, it did make some moves in that direction. At any rate, legislation and practices are becoming increasingly harmonized in each member state (towards the worst that already exists, of course).

For the anti-globalisation movement in Europe, defence of the rights of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers has become an increasing focus - even if it isn't given the consistent priority that those active in the anti-racist movement think is necessary.

The No Borders camp at Strasbourg from July 21-28, 2002 saw 2,000 people opposed to capitalist globalisation and its repressive arsenal come together from all over Europe. Strasbourg is the site of one of the key elements of fortress Europe: the Schengen system of information (SIS) which organizes the recording of information on immigrants on a European scale.

Demonstrators took action against hotels belonging to the Accor group - which is involved, together with the police in the expulsion of immigrants - and subsequently there was massive police repression. The chief of police also made an exception decision to ban any form of demonstration, placing the city centre under a state of siege for the rest of the week. No Borders nonetheless succeeded in organizing some other events that passed off without incident. This camp was another example of developing co-ordination on a European level and is not the first - or the last - of these actions.

Developments like this, together with the huge demonstration of migrant workers in Italy in the spring and the church occupations during the Spanish EU presidency must be built on and generalized, as well as the more visible mobilizations of French youth against Le Pen.

The appeal of the Madrid Conference of the anti-capitalist left ([see IV 342](#)) made the fight against racism and immigration controls one of its central themes and the conference decided that fighting around these questions should be a common campaign of the organizations involved. This reflected both the offensive of the established order but also the growing resistance.

The appeal of a number of French immigrant and anti-racist organizations in relation to the forthcoming European Social Forum ([see later article](#)) should also be supported - both in its demand that these issues are given greater priority by the anti-globalisation movement as a whole and in their attempt to increase the involvement of organizations of immigrants and their supporters in the ESF and the wider movement.

The appeal itself also reflects the increasing self-organization of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. Of course the experience in France is well known through the militant organization of the sans papiers who were able to wring at least some concessions from the state. However, these dynamics are not confined to one country - in Germany, for example, the increasingly important caravan movement is based on self organization.

In Britain, things lag behind at this level, but at least much of the increasingly united movement understands the need to give voice to those who are most directly affected. The tactics of fighting deportations must always be determined by those directly affected, while those working from the outside against immigration detention have been inspired many times by those who have taken up the only weapon left to them, the hunger strike, with such courage.

Today we are dealing with different forms of racism - both racism directed against those who have been in the country concerned all their lives (and often for several generations) and those who are newly arrived and often have no legal status. For both the extreme right and the traditional parties one of the sharpest cutting edges of their offensive is against asylum seekers and migrants - this is where increasingly restrictive laws are proposed, but also where street attacks and other hate crimes are focused.

There are also other targets of racism today that must be mentioned. In the wake of the fall of the Berlin wall, the Roma communities have not only been subject to increasing persecution within Eastern Europe, but have been treated in a particular pernicious way when they have fled westwards. This has combined with racism directed at Gypsy communities and individuals who supposedly have the protection of EU citizenship.

Then, in the wake of September 11, we have seen a major rise in Islamophobia. This phenomenon, which of course first surfaced in a major way during the Gulf war, has a crude functionality - it is a major ideological weapon in justifying war and is itself fed by it. At the most concrete level, we have seen the imprisonment without charge or trial of thousands of people, not only in the US but in virtually all European countries. The parallels with immigration detainees are striking.

There have also been street attacks and the manipulation by the far right of these questions. For example, the British National Party undoubtedly played on Islamophobia in its strong election campaigns in the North West of England in May 2002.

Those who migrated some time ago also suffer from these reactionary moves. When someone throws a firebomb at a house or beats someone up on the street because they are black, or speak a different language or look "foreign" they don't stop to ask the people if they have papers or where they were born.

But despite this reality, the response of some organizations of more settled communities has not been to throw themselves into the fight for asylum rights but rather to try even harder to become integrated into the 'host' community - saying that this has nothing to do with us. This is particularly true of some organizations which had been

offered some crumbs from the imperialist table during a more settled political and economic period during the 1980s and 1990s and whose leadership is now desperate not to lose their privileges again.

Of course there are other black organizations and community organizations of peoples who have lived in the advanced countries for a long time which put forward militant politics, who work to fight racist attacks, against the rise of the far right and to defend asylum seekers and 'illegal' workers.

Post-war migration patterns

Western Europe saw a huge upturn in immigration during the post-war boom as the need for labour increased - as did the desire to get it at the cheapest possible rate. The pattern varied from country to country.

Britain, France and the Netherlands could relatively easily make use of labour from their colonies or former colonies. Other European countries did not have this access and therefore had to set up more developed labour recruitment systems to bring in temporary workers - who were allowed to stay only as long as their labour was needed.

These arrangements existed in countries such as Switzerland, Belgium and Sweden but the best known - and most developed was the German "Guest-worker" system. Some of these "guest" workers came from the countries of the European periphery - from Spain, Portugal and Italy, from Yugoslavia or Turkey and others from further afield - with the pattern shifting over time.

The existence of these two systems had a different impact on the ability of those coming to Europe to organize. Workers who came to the 'host' countries for only short periods of time, who often lived in special accommodation and were isolated economically, socially and politically from others in the society in which they lived had less ability to organize collectively than for example Commonwealth immigrants coming to Britain who formally had full rights - for example the right to vote and to work - even though they were subjected to many racist policies and practices.

Questions of immigration are not issues only in Europe. Though Canada, the USA and Australia were all created as capitalist countries through immigration - and the subjugation of the First nations, stealing their land and resources - there too this phase of capitalist globalisation is one that demands strict border controls.

Some of the most dramatic stories both of right wing policies on asylum and resistance against them over the last year have come from Australia - from the horrendous treatment of the Tampa refugees in August 2001 (they were refused the right to land on the Australian territory of Christmas Island) to the heartrending story of the Baktiyari brothers, who escaped from Woomera detention centre, sought and were denied protection from the British consulate and are now back in Woomera. Australia has also been the site of many protests- both from those in mandatory detentions in the camps and by supporters outside.

It is interesting to look briefly at the history of immigration policy in Australia. The government initiated a mass immigration programme after 1945, aiming to increase their population of 7.5 million people for both economic and strategic reasons. The initial target was 70,000 people a year - but with 10 Britons to every 'foreigner'. It was only when it became clear that the targets for British migration could not be met, that these were shifted to include other Europeans.

Initially all non-European immigration was forbidden - the White Australia policy that was developed in the nineteenth century remained militantly in place. Asian immigration in particular was seen as a threat to Australia's identity as a

'European' nation. However, this began to change in the 1960s and 1970s with the removal of some discriminatory restrictions. By the 1990s about half of all new immigrants to Australia came from Asia. In 1994, the estimated Asian born population was 826,000 - 4.6 per cent of the total population.

It is beyond the scope of this article to consider in any great detail the processes of migration within the underdeveloped countries. However, migration cannot be understood only as an issue of the North. In fact, the greatest movements of population take place within the countries of the South.

For example, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) statistics for 2001 show that of the top 10 countries which received refugees during that year, none are in the advanced capitalist world. In 2001, Pakistan received 199,900 Afghani refugees - with very little assistance from international agencies or countries in the developed world who since September 11 have purported to care so much about the people of Afghanistan.

This reality should be no surprise, because these are the very countries that pay the greatest price for capitalist globalisation. Given that most people who leave their homes do so with virtually no resources as well as with the hope and expectation that they will return as soon as possible, then on both counts they will travel the smallest distance possible. This is important for all activists to take on board because these realities are completely ignored by the politicians and the media hacks who talk about the advanced capitalist countries as being full.

In a world where there is more and more movement of capital making profits from even plant or animal genes, from air, from water, any free movement of people is completely forbidden. These are the values of the world which the anti-capitalist left is working to change. Our anger at this inhumanity is one of the things which fuels our declaration that another world is not only possible but absolutely necessary. This world that we are working to build is one without borders, in which no one will be illegal and in which every person will have full rights.