

# NO ONE IS ILLEGAL! OPEN BORDERS TO REFUGEES

Working class must campaign to end hostile environment and welcome refugees

**In the latest tragedy in the English Channel, at least 27 refugees, including five women and a young girl, drowned when their inflatable dinghy capsized in the icy waters.**

French and British ministers have taken the opportunity to blame each other; the only thing they can agree on is to point the finger at the evil people smugglers who exploit desperation and misery.

“Why did France let them leave its coast?” say Boris Johnson and Priti Patel. “Why have the British not opened offices where they can legally apply for admission?” asks Emmanuel Macron. Coming from those who are largely responsible for causing the desperation that forces so many to flee their homes, this is just shameless cynicism, pandering to racism.

Meanwhile, Patel is looking for some sort of legal cover for ordering the British navy to “push back” the dinghies into French territorial waters, a breach of maritime law which dictates an absolute duty to rescue them. The British right wing papers meanwhile carry screaming headlines telling her to “get a grip” and to “protect Britain from invasion”.

## DEADLY

It is certainly true that many more refugees have crossed the Channel this year. By July, the number exceeded the level for the whole of 2020 and in November there were more than 1,000 arrivals for the first time. The cause of the rising number of crossings is the blockading of all other means of travel. The British government cynically calculated that the dangers of sea crossings would deter many from making the journey, especially during winter.

Another major factor is the constant warfare in Afghanistan, Yemen, Ethiopia and Sudan, not to speak of the economic impact of

Covid across Africa. Many refugees have come from overflowing camps in Iran and Turkey, which have taken in millions from Syria and Iraq.

Britain, France and the United States bear a heavy share of the blame for bombing, invading and imposing harsh economic sanctions on a series of countries in the region. Now, the Western powers have withdrawn all aid and finance from Afghanistan, holding ransom the country’s gold and currency reserves, having transferred them to central banks in Frankfurt, London, Paris and New York.

They are using starvation as a weapon against the Taliban who are in turn driving people to flee from their repressive regime. Language factors (the prevalence of English as a worldwide lingua franca) and family members in Britain, make it a natural goal for those seeking safety or, indeed, work, which would allow them to send remittances to their families at home.

## HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT

Britain and France ignore the indisputable fact that the “illegality” of these unfortunate people lies precisely in their own heartless refusal to grant entry to those fleeing war and famine, as they are obliged to do by international law. The British will not open offices where refugees could register requests for asylum before they reach the Channel. In France, they are not even given decent temporary accommodation or allowed to camp. Instead, they are left in squalid makeshift shelters alongside roads or in forests. The only help is from volunteers with a sense of human solidarity.

If they do reach Britain, they are held in detention centres. Priti Patel even wanted to have them detained in redundant cruise ships off the south

coast until an outcry stopped her.

On the other side of Europe, refugees are being treated as pawns in the struggles between the EU, Poland and Belarus, in blatant defiance of all their solemn declarations of human rights and the common duty to offer asylum. Britain has even sent troops to the eastern borders of Nato to bolster resistance.

## OPEN THE BORDERS

Socialists and trade unionists in Britain, France and the whole EU must call an end to this horrific game. Europe’s and Britain’s borders, on land, sea and air, should be opened to all those seeking asylum from war, repression and economic distress. ‘Illegal’ refugees and undocumented migrants who are already here must be given refugee or legal status and access to health and social services, education and housing. Labour parties and trade unions should make them welcome.

The media unions should halt the presses and pull the plugs on the papers and broadcasters inciting fear and hatred of these suffering people, just as papers like the Daily Mail did with the Jews fleeing Hitler in the 1930s. Most of these people had no wish to leave their homes, their jobs, their families at horrific risk.

The Western powers who are holding Afghanistan’s reserves must release them. Western NGOs must be allowed to resume medical and food aid. The immensely wealthy imperialist powers must send aid to the countries suffering from Covid and climate change. This would be only the most minimal reparation these countries deserve after centuries of exploitation by European and North American colonialism and imperialism.

# BELARUS REFUGEE CRISIS SHOWS EU HYPOCRISY

We need an international movement to smash Fortress Europe's racist borders

**On the border between Belarus and its EU neighbours— Poland, Latvia, and Lithuania—refugees from the global south are once again being used as pawns in a vicious inter-state power struggle.**

Embattled Belarusian dictator Alexander Lukashenko has been accused by the EU of manufacturing a migrant 'crisis' for the EU in retaliation for sanctions placed on his regime by the EU in response to repression meted out to protesters and journalists following the rigged August 2020 presidential election.

## **MIGRANT SURGE**

Since early summer, neighbouring EU countries have reported a 'surge' of migrants attempting to cross their borders from Belarus with the intention of claiming asylum. Eyewitnesses and border police confirm that Belarusian security forces are organising transport to the border and encouraging people to cross, after drawing them to Belarus on the promise of passage to Europe.

The migrants hail from war-torn regions of the Middle East and North Africa. The numbers of migrants crossing are not in any way overwhelming (up to 10,000 across the three countries), but right-wing politicians are using the crisis to stoke racist prejudices.

All three governments on the border have used various measures, including building fences and heightened police and military presence, to discourage the crossings and have declared states of emergency along the border.

Poland has gone furthest, forcibly removing migrants who have already crossed the border. Some migrants remain stuck between the border forces of the two countries without access to water, food or shelter. This is clearly in breach of the right to claim asylum under international law.

On 25 August, the European Court of Human Rights ordered Poland to provide humanitarian assistance to migrants and refugees at their borders, renewing the decree on 27 September. Poland has so far failed to comply with the Court's order and at least six deaths have been verified by human rights groups.

In Lithuania those who enter the country are being kept in temporary facilities. With pre-existing migration centres unequipped to handle the new numbers, migrants were initially housed in forest encampments or disused schools and later rehoused in re-purposed public facilities, including former prisons. Poor hygiene, lack of water and heating have been reported in many of these facilities.

## **IMPERIALIST CHESS GAME**

Although the EU must maintain the pretence of enforcing human rights law, its main interest is in demonstrating to Lukashenko and his Russian backers that this manufactured migrant surge will be met with an aggressive response. Any individual cases escalated to the European Court of Human Rights will take months or years to resolve. In the meantime each state is getting on with policing the border of Fortress Europe.

Meanwhile Belarus is pursuing what EU officials have called a 'hybrid war' of disinformation to foment social discontent in the EU states. This has included attempts to stoke anti-migrant sentiment by alleging that migrants have links with terrorist groups or are producing child pornography.

## **WORKERS RESPONSE**

In October, large demonstrations took place in Lithuania calling for more humane policies towards the migrants. In Warsaw, an estimated 3,000 people gathered under the

slogan 'Stop the Torture on the Border'.

There have also been solidarity efforts abroad. On 17 October, several hundred people gathered at the Polish embassy in London to protest against the government's illegal pushbacks.

However, despite this solidarity there have also been few attempts to question the logic of borders and the rights of states to police them. This demonstrates that the poison of racism is alive and kicking within the working class. Racist ideology is disseminated by the ruling class as a tool to divide and rule the workers and to prevent them from recognising that their true enemy is not the workers of other countries but instead the system of global capitalism which oppresses all workers.

Other European states are also preparing to repel a new surge of refugees from Afghanistan. Greece has recently completed a fence and surveillance system on its border with Turkey. Greek Minister Michalis Chrisochoidis said on a visit to the island of Evros: 'We cannot wait, passively, for the possible impact. Our borders will remain inviolable.' This demonstrates the hypocrisy of the EU, which calls for the human rights of migrants to be respected while simultaneously fortifying its borders and allowing the corpses of migrants to pile up on the beaches of the Mediterranean.

Meanwhile it is the migrants fleeing unimaginable poverty and war who are suffering the consequences of this imperialist chess game. The labour movement, whether in Poland, Greece or anywhere else, must stand shoulder to shoulder with these migrants and fight to smash the machinery of the imperialist European Union and replace it with a socialist United States of Europe.