

Refugee Crisis in Europe: Popular Support for Migrants Confronts Official Inhumanity

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Global Research, September 09, 2015

[World Socialist Web Site](#)

Region: [Europe](#), [Middle East & North Africa](#), [USA](#)

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Recent days have seen a powerful wave of solidarity and support for refugees arriving in Germany and Austria. Many people have been profoundly shaken by the horrific images of refugees drowning in the Mediterranean and reports of migrants suffocating by the dozens in traffickers' trucks.

Millions are shocked and appalled by scenes of exhausted families with small children confronting barbed-wire fences, and people being herded into detention camps where they are held for days without adequate food or sanitation. People across Europe were outraged when Hungarian police attacked defenseless asylum seekers with batons, stun grenades and tear gas.

Last week, it emerged that Czech authorities were stamping registration numbers on refugees' forearms, recalling the methods employed by Nazi concentration camp officials. The report unleashed a storm of protest.

Subsequently, solidarity committees sprang up in dozens of cities and towns to collect clothing, food, medicine, toiletries, toys and other items. Aid was coordinated via the Internet. Doctors and nurses offered free medical examinations and care.

An unemployed teacher who called on colleagues via Facebook to organize German-language courses and other programs for refugees was overwhelmed by the number of volunteers who came forward. An Internet platform is now offering accommodation for refugees.

Twenty thousand refugees arrived in Munich last week after a long journey across Hungary and Austria and were then taken by train and bus to other locations. When they disembarked, they were welcomed by committees formed to distribute water, lunches and toys and to offer translation assistance and other support.

These extraordinary events have revealed the immense chasm that separates the sentiments of broad masses of people from the reactionary obsessions driving state policy and official public opinion. For weeks, the politicians and media sought to stir up hostility against the refugees. Right-wing professors such as Herfried Münkler of Berlin's Humboldt University insisted that the population was terrified of the refugees. Münkler called for the ditching of "moral no-go precepts."

Over the past two years, the German political and media establishment has worked

relentlessly to convince the people that the horrors of World War II and Nazism should be forgotten. President Joachim Gauck joined other top officials in insisting that Germany had to get over its past, abandon its post-World War II policy of military restraint, resume its place as a global power with military force at its disposal, and be prepared to use that force around the world. The outpouring of public support for the refugees shows how little support this vile campaign has generated among the working masses.

When refugees held up their arms to news cameras to show the registration numbers stamped on them by Czech officials, large numbers of people decided they could no longer stand by in silence. Too great was the horrific association with the crimes of Nazism.

Asked why she had joined a welcoming committee for refugees and waited for hours at train station for their arrival, one elderly woman replied: "Before I burst into tears in front of my TV, I'd rather come here and help these long-suffering people."

In her traditional summer interview, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, in a tactical adaptation to this mood, spoke of a "culture of welcome in Germany." This was merely a maneuver. The German government is working feverishly to restrict the right of asylum and deport the majority of the refugees as soon as possible.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban spoke for all governments in Europe when he said in Brussels last Friday: "If we give the refugees the impression they are welcome, it will be a moral defeat."

The sympathy and support of broad layers of the population for the refugees is to be welcomed. But it is necessary to transform such elemental feelings of solidarity into a politically conscious struggle. This requires working through the issues underlying the refugee crisis.

How is it to be explained that 25 years after the end of Stalinist East Germany and the fall of the Berlin Wall, walls and fences are being erected across Europe, secured by barbed wire and guard dogs? Why, 70 years after the end of World War II, are people once again forced to flee their homes to be herded into camps and treated as concentration camp prisoners?

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the major capitalist powers, led by the American ruling elite, felt liberated from the constraints placed on them by the existence of the USSR. One of the central conclusions they drew was the belief that they could expand the use of military violence to achieve their geo-strategic aims. Their first victims were the energy-rich regions of the Middle East and Central Asia.

Decades of wars in Afghanistan and Iraq under the pretext of a "war on terror" ruined these countries and led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of men, women and children. This was followed by the US/NATO war for regime-change in Libya, which overthrew the government of Muammar Gaddafi and transformed the country into a "failed state," torn apart by constant fighting between rival militias. Then came the Syrian civil war, set in motion, armed and financed by US imperialism and its regional allies with the aim of overthrowing Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and installing a pro-Western puppet regime in Damascus.

The constant threat of death and destruction that is driving hundreds of thousands of people to undertake the desperate flight to Europe is the result of these crimes of imperialism. The

rise of the terrorist militia ISIS and the wars in Iraq and Syria are direct consequences of the destruction of Iraq by the US and the support given to ISIS and similar Islamist militias in Syria by US imperialism and its allies.

The refugee crisis has exploded any notion that the imperialist powers can unleash savage violence in the Middle East without consequences at home. The world is coming face to face with the global interconnectedness of modern society. What has been revealed is the irrationality of an international capitalist order that divides the world into national states and rich and poor countries.

The defense of the refugees requires a political struggle against imperialism and war. The working class in Europe and internationally must unite and take the fate of society into its own hands.

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