

The externalization* of borders, a criminal policy of imperialism

In the last years the phenomenon of migration has acquired remarkable dimensions, involving practically every country of the world.

According to UN data, the total number of migrants in the world is rapidly increasing, going from 173 million in 2000 to 244 million in 2015. The migratory flow has been particularly towards the OECD countries and is increasing more and more.

The fundamental cause of the mass migrations

Which are the reasons for these massive migrations?

People are fleeing from underdevelopment, from misery, hunger, conditions of extreme poverty, from mass unemployment and work conditions with wages below the subsistence level.

People are fleeing from wars of plunder, from reactionary civil wars, from the destabilisation of the oppressed countries, attacked and looted by imperialism, especially in Africa and the Middle East.

People are fleeing from political and religious persecution, from the instability created by terrorist attacks and the violence of reactionary and obscurantist forces connected to the oligarchies, which have caused tens of thousands of victims.

People are fleeing from land grabbing, as a result of which millions of hectares of land have come under the control of the multinationals and the governments of the rich and powerful countries; they are fleeing from deforestation and the devastation of the environment, from the difficult access to water, heightened by drought and epidemics.

So there is not just a single factor explaining the process of migration that leads millions of men and women to risk their lives, and often to lose them, in unsafe crossing of deserts and seas. However, all these factors have a fundamental cause: the capitalist-imperialist system, which has always caused great migrations, both within individual countries and on an international scale, in order to get labour-power to areas where it is needed to increase the production of surplus-value.

The migration of millions of human beings is increasing in direct proportion to the sharpening of the contradictions of imperialism, especially the contradiction between a handful of imperialist countries and the peoples of the dependent, semi-colonial and colonial countries, which are being attacked, looted and oppressed.

Imperialism is the major factor pushing more and more poor and weak peoples to migrate. At the same time, it is the principal factor pulling the migrants, leading to their employment in the imperialist metropolitan areas as a low wage labour-force subject to blackmail, in demanding, precarious and unskilled jobs, often turned down by native-born workers. The immigrants serve to raise the profits of the monopolies and other capitalist enterprises, to increase the competition among the workers, and to swell the States' coffers with contributions and taxes.

The subcontracting of borders: to select, exploit and enslave

Over the last ten years the migratory flow towards the European Union (EU) has grown enormously and in a many-sided way.

The volume of the flow, the different countries of origin of the migrants and the variation in the routes used to get to Europe, form a complex and changing situation affecting the Old Continent.

In this scenario, the imperialist and capitalist members States of the EU, in order to control the contradictions within the society caused by the mass migrations, have adopted some policies characterized by the containment, discrimination and turning back of the migrants, due to which the right of welcome and asylum is less and less guaranteed.

* The subcontracting of border management to third countries.

These policies meet the requirements of internal consent of the financial oligarchy and their governments (today racism is a “commodity” of high electoral value in countries full of discontent due to the harsh conditions of work and life), as well as the necessity to select the labour-force of the migrants (dividing them into those “seeking political asylum” and “economic migrants”, collecting information about their level of training, skill, professional qualification, etc) who are incorporated into the productive branches of the imperialist countries, depending on their technical characteristics and level of development.

One of the key approaches that EU leaders have adopted to contain and control migration is the “externalization” of border management, that is to say the subcontracting of border management to third countries.

Therefore, we observe a shift of the borders and controls beyond the national confines of the imperialist countries of the EU, expressing the inevitable tendency of finance capital to widen its own territory with the most varied forms of economic, political and diplomatic subjugation of the countries of origin of the migrants.

This process incorporates the mechanisms of progressive delocalisation of control, surveillance and detention, which are entrusted to the police and the militias of the countries whose task is to prevent the migrants, including many women and children, from arriving in the EU and to concentrate them in a network of increasingly large concentration and sorting camps, often managed by traffickers in human beings.

The shifting of the borders goes hand in hand with the thwarting of the principles sanctified in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Geneva Convention, the latter created by the will of those EU countries that today do not hesitate to abandon it.

The Khartoum Process and the relations with despotic regimes

The process of externalisation of the borders and controls, begun in the name of a presumed “struggle against illegal immigration”, has gone through some definite stages, in which imperialist Italy has played a very active role, as a country affected by the migratory stream.

On 28 November 2014 in Rome, during the six months of the Italian presidency of the EU, there was a ministerial conference among the representatives of the members States of EU, the countries of the Horn of Africa (Eritrea, Somalia, Ethiopia and Djibouti) and of some of the countries of transit (South Sudan, Sudan, Tunisia, Kenya and Egypt).

The resulting agreement, named the “Khartoum Process”, aims – under the guise of “cooperation and dialogue” – at transferring the borders of the EU to Africa, the countries through which migrants pass, or directly to their countries of departure,. The aim is to block not only the influx of the so-called “economic” migrants, but also of those seeking political asylum.

In conformity with this point of view, relations are developing with the reactionary regimes from which hundreds of thousands of people are fleeing. As part of the process of externalisation of the borders, “democratic and inclusive Europe” has no scruples about beginning talks with autocrats who are considered lawful actors of international policy and reliable and democratic partners.

For example, the UE and Italy (as well as Israel) have established good relations with the regime of Isaias Afwerki, who since 1993 has ruled Eritrea, the country from which come one of more numerous groups of people looking for protection, due to the absence of respect for human rights. The uninterrupted violations, the disastrous economic situation and the compulsory military service for an indefinite time, have caused the migration of about 400,000 Eritreans up to 2015. The aim of the EU is to close the Eritrean borders, a policy which consists in “aid packages” of hundreds of millions of Euros.

The same discourse is valid for the Sudan, a country of origin, but above all of transit, of refugees from the Horn of Africa, which is at the centre of the European and Italian strategy of externalisation. Sudan is ruled by Omar al-Bashid, accused of war crimes and genocide during the conflict in Darfur: another “good friend” who safeguards the imperialist interests of the EU and

Italy in exchange for millions in Euros and weapons.

To “co-operate” with and finance regimes such as those of Eritrea and Sudan, in order to control the migratory flow, means to support reactionary and despotic regimes which deny human and democratic rights.

The “Khartoum Process” emphasizes the control, the reinforcement of the borders and the national police forces, and the construction of “reception centres”, in order to choose the migrants under the pretext of starting the procedures for the recognition of the status of international refugee. The concrete risk is that the migrants, if they are intercepted south of the Sahara, will stay in these camps for an indeterminate time. Of course, the EU and Italy are washing their hands, externalizing their responsibility at the same time.

The Fund for blackmail and corruption

Another fundamental step in this cynical policy was taken on the occasion of the Summit between the European Union and the African Union about migration, held in November 2015 in Valletta (Malta). 25 members States of the EU, together with Norway and Switzerland, established a European Union Trust Fund (EUTF) for Africa.

This Trust Fund, which was allocated a sum of 1.8 billion Euros, has an infamous logic: to utilize the funds for cooperation and investment not only in order to export capital, but also to force the African States to cooperate in closing their borders and in readmitting their citizens that the EU members States consider undesirable.

The monetisation of the relations with the poor countries of Africa has opened the door to a system of pressures, to support for reactionary regimes and corruption, which trample underfoot the human rights and fate of thousands of people from the poorest continent, reinforcing local tyrants, mafias and paramilitary gangs.

Many projects that utilize the international cooperation funds are not destined for development projects, but for measures of control and repression at the border.

For example, the trust funds destined for Sudan serve to send material for identification and control of the borders, for the formation of border police and the construction of two camps, at Gedaref and Kassala.

These funds in the hands of the bourgeois government of the EU are real instruments of economic blackmail, threatening the States that refuse to close their borders, and reward those that repress their own citizens or refugees in transit through their territory, in the name of the collaboration with the European Union of the monopolies.

The policies established at the Summit constitute European interference in African affairs. The Trust Funds made official the idea of making the provision of the migration funds conditional, transforming them into “rewards” or “punishment” regarding the collaboration in the control of the migratory flow, in the procedures of expulsion and repatriation, inside an area – such as, for example, that of ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) – that would foresee the freedom of movement of people.

Another example of the process of the externalisation of the borders is the agreement between the EU and Turkey of March 2016 for the closure of the “Balkan route”. Under this agreement between the European leaders and Erdogan, the turning back to Turkey of those people who arrive “illegally” in Greece was imposed, thus delegating to the Turkish authorities the problem of control of the Balkan borders.

The agreement foresees many points of action, in exchange for 6 billion Euros: a substantial financial support to the reactionary regime of Erdogan, while poverty and unemployment are growing, and the democratic rights of the peoples of Turkey and of the migrants are unceasingly trampled upon.

A model that repeats and extends itself

The Italian government, after having presented the Migration Compact in Brussels in 2016 – which foresees the replication of the EU-Turkey agreement with the principal countries of origin and transit of the Central Mediterranean route – has continued to work with the German government to arrive at the commitment of 10 billion Euros for international co-operation that could be invested in Tunisia, Senegal, Ghana, Niger, Egypt and the Ivory Coast. This is in exchange for a major undertaking in the control of their borders and for the readmission of their fellow-citizens and of people who have passed through their territory. The “progressive” Renzi and Gentiloni do not care at all if the migrants will be trapped in conditions of profound vulnerability towards their rights.

After having closed the Balkan route, the EU and chiefly Italy – always more hard pressed due to the migratory flow coming from South and the lack of solidarity of the North – have the objective of closing the route passing through Libya, through which pass 90% of the migrants who cross the central Mediterranean sea.

Thus an agreement has been signed (under UN auspices) with the puppet government of al Sarraj that foresees the appropriation of hundreds of millions of Euros, the formation and the strengthening of the Libyan Coast Guard, the delivery of 10 patrol-boats, the completion of the control system of the land borders of that North African country and the construction of refugees camps in Libya, a country in which the migrants suffer arbitrary detention, violence, torture, murder and sexual exploitation.

In May of 2017 a summit took place among the Interior Ministers of Italy, Libya, Chad and Niger to watch over and block Libya’s southern borders. The chiefs of the Tebu, Suleiman and Tuareg tribes of the Sahara are also involved in the project, whom Italy wants to utilize – also with the aid of drones, satellite images, weapons and funds – to seal the corridors through which the migrants are passing.

Neo-colonialism and the negation of national sovereignty

The element that emerges from the agreements reached by the EU regarding migration is the interest of the European imperialist and capitalist countries in blocking and selecting the flow of migrants as far away as possible from their own borders, entrusting the operations of security and control directly to the countries from which the migrants come or pass through.

While “Fortress EU” and its members States pretend to take up the cause of human rights, in practice they reach agreements with vassals and puppets of imperialism who do not respect either the fundamental rights of their populations or those of the migrants.

Thus the EU and Italy totally avoid their responsibility after having exercised colonial and imperialist rule in Africa and the Middle East for a long time, subjugating the peoples and looting their wealth in order to satisfy their own economic and strategic interests. Besides, they forget the mass migration of the last centuries, which is still continuing today and the increase in the number of young people without jobs (at present there are about 5.2 million Italians in foreign countries, while there are about 5 million foreign citizens in Italy).

The consequences of these agreements are the blocking of the routes utilized by the migrants to reach Europe that are thus becoming increasingly long and risky, and are a substantial negation of the right of asylum and humanitarian protection, which are being denied in the name of “protection” of the European borders.

With the externalisation of the borders and controls, a neo-colonial extension of the rule of the imperialist States and a complete negation of the sovereignty of the dependent and semi-colonial States are being established.

Nevertheless this policy – masked by a false humanitarianism – has not achieved all its goals. The migratory flow, fed by powerful causes, has not registered the decrease and control hoped for by the bourgeoisies.

Consequently direct military action is advancing: military ships, helicopters, reconnaissance

aircraft, drones, military technologies and troops specialized in blocking the boats on which migrants embark, turning them back at sea and on land, creation of “floating hotspots*”, the imposition of codes of conduct on the ships of humanitarian organizations, completely ignoring humanitarian principles and the reasons for mass migrations.

The operations “Mare Sicuro” (Secure Sea) and “Sophia”, directed by imperialist Italy, are further steps toward the use of military force in the Mediterranean. These naval missions aim to abrogate the international right of the sea and to enter into the territorial waters and land of Libya to block the flow of migrants.

In addition to being acts of war against migrants, who will be driven into concentration camps in an insecure country with the danger of suffering brutal violence, the measures decided by the Italian government are the prelude to new disastrous military adventures in Libya, in order to divide up the North African “failed state” and its reserves of oil and natural gas.

At the same time, within the EU countries security policies are being implemented and a shameful ideological offensive is being developed that spreads racism and xenophobia, the policy of “national preference” is being fostered, supported by populist, chauvinist, extreme right-wing and fascist parties and movements in order to turn the discontent of the native-born workers against the migrants fleeing from war and hunger, in order to divide and subjugate them both.

For the rights of migrants, for solidarity between the exploited workers and the oppressed peoples

The migrants are completely right when they denounce the increasingly high walls being constructed to exclude them, the discriminatory policies of imperialism and its vassals, the murders and deportations of the State, the inhuman conditions existing in the “welcome” centres managed by the regimes and the mafias, the injustices and violence that they suffer, the xenophobia and racism spread by the ruling classes.

Our duty is to cooperate in the struggle and unity of the migrants, to aid the development of their class conscience, to support their fighting for integration with the organisations of the native-born workers, to promote the participation in the class struggle of all the exploited against the exploiters.

The workers of the European countries and the whole world must unite in order to put an end to the criminal and discriminatory policies of imperialism.

We demand a policy of dignified and respectful welcome of the migrants and their rights.

We demand the opening of safe channels of access for the migrants.

Abrogation of the racist laws and measures against the migrants.

NO to the centres of expulsion and “administrative” detention.

Residence permits for applicants and transit documents for migrants.

Political asylum for all victims of wars and fascist persecution.

Regularisation, equal wages and rights for immigrant workers.

No collaboration with reactionary and fascist regimes!

NO to the gendarmes of the EU and Italy on the European borders! NO to the externalisation of the borders and to the turning away of immigrants!

NO to the military missions, imperialist wars and militarisation of our countries!

Let us develop international solidarity of the exploited workers and the oppressed peoples!

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Communist Platform – for the Communist Party of the Proletariat of Italy

* Centers of identification on the sea, to prevent migrants from escaping their control.