

## **CROSSING BORDERS IN THE NEW IMPERIALISM**

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In words which seem uncannily relevant today, two mid-nineteenth century fugitives (in today's language asylum seekers) wrote that "the bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world-market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country"<sup>1</sup>. This cosmopolitanization (or in today's vocabulary globalization) turned out to be neither as continuous nor as complete as they expected. By the beginning of the following century other emigrant followers of these two men began to argue that the full economic integration of world capitalism would be prevented by strife between the industrialized countries. Imperialism in this sense seemed to mean that globalization would be a task for post-capitalist society.

This appeared to be confirmed by the following half century of war, protectionism and deep economic crisis until, in the middle of the twentieth century, cosmopolitan capitalism made its big comeback. Globalization is more than anything else the feature of today's capitalism which leads many to argue that there is a new imperialism, or even that imperialism has been replaced by something else (for instance, by "post-imperialism" or by "Empire").

The real newness of the present is, however, debatable. In trying to discern the character of an age, it is tempting to argue that everything has been totally transformed and a qualitatively new epoch has dawned. It is usually more accurate to say that there are new combinations of already known things. Most of the the global or international characteristics of capitalist exploitation have existed throughout its life; it is the specific forms which these aspects assume which change and fluctuate.

In other words imperialism in a broad sense both preceded and survived Imperialism in a narrower sense. At least four elements stressed in old socialist ideas about imperialism retain their relevance: the economic competition and occasional political conflict between developed capitalist states as well as the conditions under which they cooperate; the global polarization of power and income between those few developed states and the rest along with the division of labour between them; the predatory expansion of capitalist relations of production to absorb non-capitalist places and activities; and global cultural conflict. Through a combination of secular and cyclical change in these four dimensions the international aspects of capitalism evolve from one period to another creating new combinations rather than qualitatively different epochs. The salient characteristics of the present period may be new from a short term perspective but quite old from a long term one.

## THE NEW GLOBALIZATION

To be more specific, capitalist economies are now certainly more economically integrated, in trade, investment and finance, than they were in 1950; but it is much less clear that they are strikingly more integrated than they were in 1900<sup>2</sup>. Hegemony is another feature which seems to shift back and forth. After 1950 we got used to thinking of the USA as the overwhelmingly hegemonic power. In the 1980s all the talk was of its waning hegemony. But then the collapse of the USSR seemed to produce a second coming for US hegemony. If that is true it cannot be put down to economics. The simplest statistical measure of a country's relative power is its share of the world's production. In the case of the USA this fell from about 27 per cent in 1950 to 22 per cent in 1973, since when it has hardly varied at all<sup>3</sup>. The 'new economy' boom of the late 1990s seemed to promise a new dominance based on US

supremacy in high-tech industries. Subsequently, however, the fragility of that boom and the exaggerated expectations about the US economy which emerged from it have become clearer<sup>4</sup>. If trends of the last 20 years were maintained the USA would be replaced as the largest economy in the world in about 2009 – by China. If that country seems set to be the USA's most probable future challenger, further doubts about US hegemony were raised during the preparations for the 2003 invasion of Iraq when, for the first time in decades, a group of large developed countries (with the some support from China and more from Russia) dared to launch a sharp if so far limited political challenge to US foreign policy. At the same time the European Union is adopting an increasingly confrontational approach to trade and other disputes with the USA. Perhaps the present swaggering unilateralism of the Bush administration is partly an indication that it does not possess the degree of hegemony which others perceive it to have.

The impulse behind the new world economy is often seen as coming from multinational corporations. Once again both their newness and their size tends to be exaggerated. In 1990 the 100 largest multinational companies (according to the value of their foreign assets) produced something like 7 per cent of the total value of world production and this had risen by 2000 to about 7½ per cent<sup>5</sup>. Some things did change, however, during that decade. In 1990 all of the 100 corporations were from developed countries; by 2000 the number of US and European companies in the top 100 had declined, that of smaller developed countries had grown and 5 of the hundred came from developing countries. This reflects something much more general: a new dynamic capitalist development of parts of the Third World, especially in Asia but also in isolated pockets in Latin America. There has been a noticeable if limited shift in the division of labour towards a selection of industrializing countries (of which the

most important is China and the most advanced are Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore). Once again all this implies important but hardly as yet epochal change.

Something else which is new arises from factors already mentioned – the fact that now, even by the restrictive definitions of capital flows used by international financial institutions, “developing countries export capital to high income countries”<sup>6</sup>. This is independent of the flows such as debt service, the repatriation of profits by multinational corporations or unequal exchange which have meant, as many socialists have argued, that poor countries have always financed richer ones in various ways. For several years Third World governments and capitalists have been net acquirers of assets (shares, bonds, foreign exchange and bank accounts) while the United States in particular has been incurring equivalent liabilities. The USA has since the mid-1980s fallen ever deeper into debt. Its growing excess of national spending (on imported consumer goods, investment, military expenditure and so on) has to be financed by foreign savings, especially of Japan, China and other East Asian countries. A hegemonic power which is seriously and growingly indebted to the rest of the world is certainly a novelty whose consequences are still not foreseeable.

## MIGRATION AND THE WORLD ECONOMY

Many people also see international migration as a new element in the present conjuncture of imperialism. Modern capital accumulation and industrialization has produced an immense and universal increase in one form of migration – namely from country to town, although even now only about half the world’s human population is classified as urban dwellers and being some kind of a peasant is still the world’s most numerous occupation (followed by being an employee in a service industry)<sup>7</sup>. But

mass migration of people across frontiers is, like other aspects of globalization, nothing new in the history of capitalism (let alone, of course, in longer term history during which humans have shown themselves to be habitual long distance migrants). The forced migration of slaves and then indentured workers from Africa and Asia and the vast migrations from Europe to North America all played important roles in the history of capital accumulation and imperialism. The migration of recent decades is certainly more varied in its forms and more inclusive regarding the countries involved than previous major migrations. A judgement about its size depends on the perspective it is seen from.

About 2 per cent of the world's population, according to rough estimates, now live in countries of which they are not citizens. The percentage might rise to a maximum of 3 per cent if it were possible to calculate the number of people who live in countries where they were not born. Is this percentage large or small? It certainly seems small compared with other indicators of globalization. For instance, on average about 20 percent of what residents of each country consume is imported from another country. And international migrants as a percentage of the population have been rising much more slowly than international trade as a proportion of production. While nearly all governments now declare themselves to be in favour of the maximum freedom of movement for goods, capital and finance, no government has opened its borders to people, indeed most countries of immigration are trying hard to close them to many kinds of immigrant. In addition, while vast legions of intellectuals, politicians and bureaucrats argue for free trade and free capital movements, and international organizations like the IMF and the WTO exist to bring about these goals, the number who argue for the free movement of human beings is extremely limited and no international organization promotes it, unless one counts the International Tourism

Organisation. Some of the theoretical high priests of free trade and capital movements (including Milton Friedman and Gary Becker) have explicitly declined to apply their arguments to the international movement of labour<sup>8</sup>. Among the pillars of neoliberal ideology, the *Wall Street Journal*, in advocating the elimination of national borders, stands as a rule-proving exception.

Even without encouragement, however, the increasing integration of world production and finance and a large number of political upheavals has inevitably produced a rise in both forced and voluntary migration across international frontiers. This rise is driven by a combination of three factors. First are those which push people to consider leaving the place where they are: poverty, hunger, war, unemployment, lack of economic opportunity, physical danger and persecution by states, priests, parents, husbands and others. Whether or not such conditions are growing or diminishing, there is certainly no shortage of them in the world. Second are the pull factors: economic growth and demand for labour in other countries and in many cases direct international labour recruitment by companies or governments, in addition to a host of non-economic dreams and aspirations. And third there are the facilitating factors such as the wider spread of information along with the availability of cheap travel, designed originally for businesses and tourists but increasingly available to migrants. Migration tends to be self-reinforcing in that the establishment of communities of migrants or their descendants in the countries of destination makes it easier for new migrants from the same places to establish themselves and find help and acceptance. These frequently become authentically multinational communities, containing millions of multinational families whose members move in two-way flows between country of origin and country of destination. Finally, there has been an expansion in the number of people who organize international migration, varying

from modern slave traffickers to people simply providing services such as hiring out their boat or truck, guiding people over a dangerous frontier or forging a document.

The 2–3 per cent of the world's population who live outside their country of origin are not, of course, randomly distributed. They come disproportionately from certain countries and groups and go disproportionately to others. A few countries, because of their political or economic situation, as well as that of their neighbours, are places of significant immigration and emigration at the same time (in recent years these have included Jordan, Somalia, Paraguay, the Dominican Republic, Poland, Burkina Faso, Bolivia, Sudan, Botswana, South Korea, Egypt, Tunisia, Iraq and Iran)<sup>9</sup>. But in general most are countries either of emigration or of immigration. And within the latter immigrants are often concentrated in particular areas, especially in a growing number of “world cities”<sup>10</sup>.

Theories of imperialism focus on the hierarchy of nations, but some of them see it in the context of the other factors—class, gender, color, culture and so on—which go to make up the system of interlocking hierarchies which compose capitalist society. Mass migration across national frontiers, in particular from less to more developed countries, adds a new complexity to this way of looking at things. To some extent such migration breaks down the previous geographical clarity of the hierarchy of nations. Workers from Latin America living and working in the USA are geographically no longer in the Third World but are directly exploited in the First World and are part of its population, perhaps even full citizens. Their inferior position in the social hierarchy is now explained less by nation or geographical position, more by class, and perhaps also by other factors like language, colour or religion. Yet part of the old situation remains: workers may retain close contacts with their families who may even be economically dependent on them. Their position in society will also be

affected by cultural factors which relate to national origins, language or colour. Immigrants are not a new class or layer of society. But they become incorporated within the multiple and superimposed nature of hierarchies in their new country of residence while often retaining a position in other hierarchies in their old country.

## THE CHARACTER OF THE MAJOR MIGRATION FLOWS

A major proportion of the world's migrant population consists of forced migrants fleeing genocide, political persecution or economic catastrophe. Of the twelve million people counted as international refugees and asylum seekers by the UNHCR at the end of 2001 the largest absolute numbers were (in descending order) in Pakistan, Iran, Germany and the USA. Eight countries, none of them developed, housed refugees amounting to more than 2 per cent of their own population (Armenia, Congo Republic, Yugoslavia, Djibouti, Iran, Zambia, Guinea and Tanzania). The number in Britain, where complaints about their presence is so strident, was only 0.31 per cent, much less than Germany (1.2 per cent), slightly less than Ireland and slightly more than France. The great majority of refugees are not in developed countries at all but in developing ones neighbouring the country they have fled from<sup>11</sup>.

There is no simple dichotomy between forced and voluntary migration since most migration choices are probably constrained in some ways; though it also seems too reductive to say, as some do, that all migration is forced. The flows of migration which have developed in recent years have to an important degree been determined by the migrants themselves as subjects. Among these flows are several between developing countries (for instance between Indonesia and Malaysia, or between countries of West Africa) and three major flows from less towards more developed



countries: first, to Western European countries, largely from their ex-colonies (the Caribbean, South Asia, North Africa, Tropical Africa) and from Turkey; the second from Central America and subsequently East Asia to the USA; the third from West and South Asian countries to the oil-producing countries of the Arabian/Persian Gulf.

After the early 1970s the newly super-rich oil states embarked on ambitious plans to transform their infrastructure, and workers from all over Asia (especially South Asia) were recruited, to the point where they came to outnumber the local population in some small countries. Virtually the whole working population consisted of immigrants and the local populations were converted into a rentier class. This was very different from migration to Europe or the USA. From the beginning it was regarded by the Gulf states as temporary; workers lived tightly controlled lives and family migration was not allowed. Governments tried to maintain a strict apartheid between nationals and foreign workers and the latter had even fewer political and civil rights than the former, if that can be imagined. They wanted workers, not people. For some regions of India, however, Kerala in particular, the employment and resulting flow of funds became important and played a role in Kerala's ability to maintain relatively high levels of state provision for health and education, even though the local economy was not very developed. This is an example among many where the new migration led to economic benefits but also to a new dependence on migration<sup>12</sup>.

While in modern history large-scale immigration is new to Europe and the Middle East this is not true of the USA (or Canada). Between 1820 and 1996 63 million immigrants entered the USA; during the first 15 years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century migration was adding about 1 per cent a year to the country's population, considerably more than today. Restrictions after World War I, and the increasingly

racist structure of immigration laws, then produced 50 years of very low immigration. After the repeal of racist immigration quotas in 1965 immigration, primarily from Central America, but later from Asia and virtually all other parts of the globe, accelerated. That already mentioned canny pair of 19<sup>th</sup> century asylum seekers saw very clearly how mass immigration was the US ruling class's weapon of mass destruction against European hegemony:

Precisely European immigration fitted North American for a gigantic agricultural production, whose competition is shaking the very foundations of European landed property – large and small. At the same time, it enabled the United States to exploit its tremendous industrial resources with an energy and on a scale that must shortly break the industrial monopoly of Western Europe, and especially of England, existing up to now<sup>13</sup>.

Despite the official US ideology of openness, attempts to curb immigration abound, but they have usually failed to achieve the desired result. High immigration continues and, given the relatively rapid economic assimilation of immigrants, helps to maintain the growth in the size of the US economy compared with its rivals, as some of its advocates have realized<sup>14</sup>. As in Europe, US immigration practice has led to a polarized kind of immigration in which highly qualified and very unqualified labour predominate. Since the mid-1990s spending on illegal migration control has sharply increased. This is reflected in the stepping up of border controls between the USA and Mexico, and after the attack on the World Trade Center also on a vast increase in port and airport security and the large scale arrest and detention of Arab and Islamic men. The budget of the US immigration service tripled during the years

1980–2000; yet during the same time the number of foreigners illegally in the USA is estimated also to have tripled from 3 million to 9 million<sup>15</sup>. This is in spite of the fact that intensified frontier policing, as intended, makes migration physically more dangerous and has led to a marked increase in the numbers of migrants dying from starvation, drowning and shooting along the US–Mexican border. The number estimated to have been killed rose steadily from 87 in 1996 to 499 in 2000<sup>16</sup>. If recent US history repeats itself the 9 million illegal immigrants will at some point receive an amnesty and immigration control will begin again from scratch, although it is a possibility that such actions will now be seen as inconsistent with the fight against terrorism.

The origins of post-1950 migration into Western Europe can be found in the combination of the collapse of colonialism and the economic boom during the 1950s and 1960s. Efforts, especially by Britain and France, to turn their previous colonial empires into a Commonwealth or Communauté for a time fostered relatively liberal immigration and citizenship regimes. And rapid economic growth created growing demand for labour. Germany had to improvise an ex-empire, choosing Turkey as its honorary ex-colony.

The overall numbers of immigrants in Europe are hard to compare with those in the USA since most European countries count foreign citizens while the USA counts residents born outside the country (a figure which tends to be higher due to past naturalizations). France, however, gives figures for both concepts: about 5 per cent of the population have foreign nationality while 10 per cent were born abroad. This difference is larger than in most countries since the rate of naturalization of foreigners is relatively high. In Britain, where naturalization is more difficult, the number of foreign nationals is about 4 per cent; in Germany, where naturalization for

people who are not ethnically German is even harder, foreign nationals are 8.9 per cent of the population. In the USA 10.4 per cent are foreign born, implying perhaps 6 per cent with foreign nationality. So to this extent the US and Western European figures are not too dissimilar.

The USA, of course, is a more ethnically diverse country due to earlier migrations. In several European countries, however, as in the USA one nationality dominates recent immigration. Thirteen per cent of the US population are considered “hispanic”, most of these being immigrants from Mexico or their descendants. People born in Mexico and resident in the USA are equal to 7 per cent of the Mexican population. No European country shows such high concentrations: the Turks in Germany are nearly 4 per cent of the Turkish population and nearly 3 per cent of the German. About 3 per cent of the population of the three Magreb countries are resident in Europe where they represent 2.6 per cent of the population of France and smaller proportions of the populations of Spain, Belgium and the Netherlands<sup>17</sup>. All of these have become multi-national communities in which many members move back and forth between their country of origin and country of residence, as have South Asians and Caribbeans in the UK. These figures give little indication as to the ethnic composition of populations since many immigrants are white and many people of colour have become citizens and so are not included in figures for foreign nationals. And other people of colour are both citizens and were born in the country. The 2001 census in Britain found that 9 per cent of the population were not white.

Since the late 1960s migration policy and the presence of immigrants has inexorably moved up the political agenda in many Western European countries. Neo-fascist, racist and right-wing populist politicians and groups have used the presence of immigrants as the centrepiece of their argument and at various moments have gained

some political ground. They have had considerable success in raising the presence of immigrants as a threat to existing populations and blaming them for an extraordinarily long list of evils: violent crime, disease, drugs, environmental degradation, unemployment, the deficiencies of the welfare state and more. The fact that the evidence for most of these claims is either non-existent or even suggests the opposite has little effect. In Britain it was Enoch Powell who, in 1968, in what seems in retrospect a turning-point in British politics, established the idea that there should be a limit to the proportion of “citizens of the new commonwealth and their descendants” (i.e. people who were not white) in the population. He predicted that without a major change in policy, by the year 2000 the proportion would rise to 10 per cent and that the result would be “the Tiber foaming with much blood”. Margaret Thatcher when prime minister later reduced the supposedly critical percentage. More recently the percentage has been raised by some anti-immigration commentators but the argument has not changed. In Britain at least the extremist racist parties have not thrived because mainstream politicians, media, think tanks and intellectuals have adopted more reasonable-sounding expressions of their ideas. As early as 1961 the Labour Party had abandoned its commitment to free immigration for all commonwealth citizens. Powell was sacked from the British shadow cabinet by Edward Heath, but it was Heath’s government that introduced the Commonwealth Immigrants Act in 1971. Labour promised to repeal it but failed to do so when in office from 1974 to 1979.

This change in the conventional approach to the immigration issue was hastened from the mid-1970s onward by increasing unemployment levels throughout Europe after a long period of high employment, although there is no evidence that the rise in unemployment had anything to do with immigration. But governments were

becoming impressed with another economic argument: the idea that the supply of particular kinds of skilled workers (especially in high-technology sectors), increasingly known as human capital, was the key to stimulating growth and exports and attracting foreign capital, in short to international competitiveness. This was to lead to a more liberal immigration policies towards skilled workers, as well as foreign students who were increasingly encouraged to stay and work in the country of study: Britain was the most notable practitioner of this policy and presently holds the world record for the highest number of foreign graduate students per head of the population (about 1 in 200). These areas of migration policy, however, are becoming more conflictive: Indian IT firms recently claimed that their technical workers were suffering increasing discrimination by immigration authorities when working on short term contracts in developed countries; and post Sept 11<sup>th</sup> controls have led to a large backlog of graduate student applicants for entry to the USA<sup>18</sup>. And finally the collapse of the communist regimes and increasing hardship, political disorder and freedom to move away from it led at the start of the 1990s to a brief increase in immigrants from the east seeking asylum in Western Europe, most of them being ethnic Germans entering Germany<sup>19</sup>. The more recent substitution of asylum applicants from Eastern Europe by applicants from other places (such as Iraq, Somalia and Zimbabwe) has in the first years of the present century provoked a new crisis in European migration as a whole which centres on the questions of asylum and illegal migration.

## GOVERNMENT POLICY AND ASYLUM APPLICANTS

In recent years in Europe changes in migration policy have tended to be frequent and sudden. This results from several factors: governments want to increase

some kinds of migration while at the same time reducing others; they are trying to please contradictory parts of the electorate (some wanting more and some less immigration); they have found that expensive efforts to increase the policing of frontiers do not seem to work and may even have perverse effects (discouraging people from leaving once they have successfully arrived); alternatives to immigration such as aid to source countries also seems to have perverse effects; and finally they vacillate about enforcing the high level of repression both at and within borders which rigid migration control would require.

Nearly all countries now wish to encourage the immigration of skilled workers, both for their key skills and because increasing skilled workers is part of encouraging foreign investment. Legal unskilled immigrants in developed countries are not very numerous but some sectors of low productivity agriculture are dependent on them and so reducing their number might have severe regional economic consequences in parts of countries such as the USA, Spain and even the UK, which has recently authorized an increase in temporary unskilled migrant agricultural workers. The right to immigration of family members of legal residents is also difficult to curtail. In some countries this composes the major part of current legal immigration. It has been roughly calculated that the immigration multiplier (the total number of subsequent legal immigrants for each legal primary migrant) is about 1.2, that is every 100 primary immigrants implies 120 additional legal immigrants within 10 years<sup>20</sup>. In the long run this element of immigration can only be reduced by reducing other forms of legal immigration; in the short run it can only be reduced by forbidding immigrants to live with their close families, which violates an ideological tenet of most western governments and might be expected to engender serious protest and would discourage the migration of skilled workers.

With these three legal categories of immigration difficult or impolitic to reduce, the attack on immigration must focus on two remaining categories— asylum applicants and illegal immigrants. The right to asylum from persecution, however, has been (as long as it is resorted to in moderation) one of the defining rights of the “free world”. It was used in this way particularly during the Cold War when the West was secure in the knowledge that while those in the unfree world had the right to asylum they would be prevented from taking it up by the strict control of exit by the communist regimes. Asylum applications increased with the fall of the Berlin wall and panic increased even faster<sup>21</sup>. When that crisis ultimately subsided asylum applications remained relatively high, partly because others now followed the East European example. Western countries have, therefore, tried to cut the number of asylum applications without abolishing the right to asylum as such, something which would threaten their credibility as “free nations”.

Various ways have been sought to go back to the good old days of the Cold War when asylum was a principle but not so much a practice. In the first place, a rapidly expanding list of countries has been designated as places from which no asylum applications will be accepted since they are already “free” and therefore persecution is by definition ruled out. It will be interesting to see what happens when Anglo-American occupied Iraq (the leading country of origin of asylum applications in developed countries between 2000 and 2002) is declared “free”. Secondly, applying for asylum has been made more difficult. The British government’s attempt to restrict valid applications to those made at the moment of entry to the country, however, has, at the time of writing, failed. Third, the living conditions of asylum applicants have been made more arduous in order to dissuade applications. Applicants are forbidden to work; financial support has been cut and some applicants are obliged



to live under conditions of detention while their applications are processed. Fourth, the processing of applications has been speeded up so that in principle failed applicants spend less time in the country. Fifth, the rate of forcible deportations of failed applicants has increased, although most are not deported. An unknown number leave of their own accord. By the end of 2002, however, measures such as these had not had the desired effect of reducing the number of applications. In Britain, in particular, they reached record levels.

In view of this failure it is not surprising that many governments, especially in Europe, have become attracted by a more radical approach, advocated especially by the British Labour government. This would involve not allowing any applicants to enter the country where asylum is sought but obliging them all to register their application from transit camps (officially known as International Transit Centres) outside the country. For this the British Conservative Party, like its Australian counterpart, favours small islands, which are easy to isolate; instead the British Labour Government has proposed countries like Albania which are outside the EU but which might like to make some money by housing asylum applicants, becoming a kind of international Group 4 (a British private security company with contracts to manage some prisons and asylum applicants detention centres).

. Applications would then be processed at a distance. Failed applicants (which presumably as today would be the great majority, presently in Britain around 90 per cent) would be deported from the transit area to their country of origin or some other country which would accept them. Successful applicants would be admitted to the country of asylum but burdened with a debt, equivalent to the cost of their upkeep in the Transit Centre, a burden which it is hoped might dissuade them from seeking asylum in the first place<sup>22</sup>.

If and when asylum seekers are thereby eliminated as part of the resident population the anti-immigration campaign will have to concentrate on illegal immigrants. This will require police campaigns to find and if necessary forcibly eject thousands of failed asylum applicants who are still present (a policy recently recommended by the home affairs select committee of the British House of Commons), and to detect others who have overstayed the limiting date of their visas or who have entered clandestinely without papers of any kind. It is impossible to imagine that such a policy could be carried out effectively throughout Europe without enormous police intrusions on the "innocent" as well as the "guilty". If no more asylum applicants are allowed to enter the country then there will probably be a rise in attempted illegal entries. This can only be prevented by a much stronger policing of the borders. This is already happening in the sea crossings between Spain (including the Canary Islands) and Morocco. Greater enforcement has brought similar results to those already mentioned for Mexico. Expenses have risen, the number of detained migrants has not risen substantially, the estimated number of successful illegal entries has risen and so has the number of deaths due to drowning and exposure during the crossing. Estimates by the Association of Moroccan Workers in Spain (ATIME) put the death toll in the seas between Morocco and Spain at about 4000 during the five years 1997–2001, a figure that is broadly in line with the one appearing in the Spanish press.

Already coast guards and port police forces have been strengthened and in some places the military also takes part in border control. NATO forces have directly assisted the policing of frontiers in Italy and probably elsewhere. In a speech shortly after taking office the NATO Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic, General William Kernan, argued in 2000 that "In the future, the task will not only be to defend the

borders (of its member states) but to fight against ethnic violence, international crime and illegal immigration.”<sup>23</sup>. A recent report, written for the International Organization for Migration, estimates that the world’s 25 richest countries “are probably spending US\$ 25–30 billion a year on immigration enforcement and asylum processing mechanisms”<sup>24</sup>, a figure which is about two-thirds of their total spending on development aid and one which is rising fast while development aid stagnates.

The plea to curb immigration in the interest of preventing too much ethnic and cultural diversity for the nation to maintain internal order is offered up as a conservative argument for a peaceful status quo. But in fact it can only be achieved by a radical change in the nature of the state, involving a major reduction of human rights and a large step towards a more repressive state, from which not only would-be immigrants will suffer. It turns out to be a great error to think that transport and communications can be revolutionized and that borders can be opened to goods, capital and money but not to people, if only because, unknown to many governments, people are much smarter than goods or money. The designers of the European Union were aware of this and have to some extent accepted its consequences by allowing relative freedom of movement of citizens within its borders. But the designers of a globalized world have not.

At present, the major capitalist countries compete for one kind of migrant but they seem to be united on the need to exclude others (asylum applicants and most unskilled workers and in particular illegal immigrants). It is not at all clear, however, that they will be able to establish a common strategy against unwanted immigration, using their increasingly divided alliance, NATO. The bitter, although finally settled, conflict between the British and French government over the Sangatte refugee camp<sup>25</sup> was a example of the problems which they will encounter. In any event tighter

migration control seems inconceivable without a major increase of state repression and an equivalent loss of civil rights.

## MIGRATION AND REDISTRIBUTION

The distribution of income between the countries of the world was more unequal at the end of the twentieth than it was at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup><sup>26</sup>. There has been little enough redistribution within the developed countries themselves; on a world scale it has been negligible. Official development assistance has fallen to the negligible level of about 0.2 per cent of the national income of developed countries. President Bush's appropriation bill to pay for the first six months of the 2003 invasion of Iraq was worth about 8 times as much as annual US official development aid to the rest of the world. Protectionism and dumping continues to damage poor primary producing countries, and many countries are burdened with an immense debt service obligation, often to pay off loans which have accumulated in the foreign bank accounts of the privileged or which have paid for state repression. With the very partial exception of the Nordic countries, there is no evidence that the richer capitalist countries take the question of extreme world inequality seriously. It is natural that many citizens of poor countries look to temporary or permanent migration to rich countries as a way of redistributing income through individual action.

If loans, aid and trade in present conditions are at best extremely limited as motors of development in poor countries, the possible positive effects on world equality of the migration of poorer people to richer countries are also limited by a number of factors. First, there is not a close correlation between poverty and successful migration. It is not yet the very poorest countries which provide the largest

numbers of migrants; nor do migrants usually come from the most deprived classes. The many needy people who might benefit from the ability to migrate for work are hindered by the cost of migration which is itself greatly increased by anti-migration policies and laws in the richer countries. This situation is made worse by the trends in migration policy described above.

Despite this, many millions of people from poor countries have been able to improve their and their families' economic position by migration. There is much evidence also that it has helped the economic situation of their country, by increasing foreign exchange availability, by raising the skills of the labour force when migrants return, by raising the wages in the countries from which the migrants come and by the transfer of part of the emigrants' earnings. Some of these effects are seen in the figures for the constantly rising flow of migrants' remittances from richer countries back to their countries of origin. In the year 2000 the total of remittances registered by the World Bank was US\$ 80 billion (almost certainly an underestimate), of which about one quarter went to India and Mexico and about one third originated in the USA. This means that the individual decisions of individual migrant workers lead to considerably more money being transferred to poorer countries than all the development aid provided by the world's richest countries (including the multilateral agencies) which has been stuck at about US\$ 50 billion (an overestimate) for several years. In the case of the USA remittances are estimated at 2 ½ times the level of development assistance. While the distribution of remittances reflects the relative economic position of those who are able to migrate successfully, it is still almost certainly better distributed than development aid, so much of which is lost in corruption and bureaucratic inefficiency. The ending of migrants' remittances would now be a much more catastrophic event than the ending of official development aid.

European governments and the European Union have for some time been toying with the idea of using development aid as an antidote to immigration: aid would be concentrated on areas from which produced a disproportionate number of migrants came and on projects expected to curb migration, either because they provided alternative economic opportunities or because they were used explicitly to boost emigration control in the country of origin. The idea has not really got off the ground, partly because Third World governments are often happy for migration to take place, either to ease various pressures or because they lead to future remittances, and second because several studies have suggested that the effect of aid on migration will, from this point of view, be perverse. Aid, along with trade and investment, between two countries serves to increase knowledge of opportunities in the richer countries, to build the contacts which make migration networks possible and to produce the resources to finance migration. The USA dropped the idea of aid against migration some years ago which is one reason why its aid budget remains so low<sup>27</sup>. The European pursuit of stronger border control suggests that EU governments have drawn the same conclusions.

In theory it might be expected that any positive effects on inter-country distribution would be offset by the negative effects of more immigration on workers in the developed countries. The effects of immigration on employment and wages have been quite widely studied by economists but they have failed to reach a consensus. One careful comparative evaluation of economic studies of this question concludes that “the growing body of empirical research on the economic impacts of immigration has produced many and various findings, but there does not seem to be any consistent evidence of broad net negative effects on wage or employment levels among native born workers”<sup>28</sup>. The absence of the expected effect is often explained

by arguing that the labour market is not a simple, single entity but a whole series of relatively segmented markets. The effects of immigration may be only on one of these, rather than on the level of wages and unemployment as a whole. In particular, many immigrant communities, once they reach a critical minimum size, form partially self contained economic enclaves with their own partly separate economies.

Immigrants themselves, however, often suffer discrimination when they try to integrate themselves in the economic life of the destination countries. Many of them receive lower wages and suffer higher levels of unemployment than the population as a whole, though it should not be forgotten that immigrants are an increasingly bipolar category, divided between the more than averagely skilled and the less than averagely skilled with relatively few in the middle skill categories. In Britain a higher proportion of immigrants have low educational qualifications than the population as a whole; but also a higher proportion of immigrants have especially high educational qualifications<sup>29</sup>.

There is something which economic studies have missed. Virtually all of them have looked at the effect on wages and employment of the *number* of immigrants. Few, if any, have looked at the effects of the *legal status* of immigrants. Whatever is the economic consequence of the amount of immigration it is predictable that the criminalization of part of the migrant population will have a serious effect on inequality. It obliges immigrants to pay enormous sums in order to enter destination countries, it renders them victims of criminal traffickers or bosses who super-exploit them, it leaves them particularly vulnerable to threats if they do manage to migrate and find employment, it renders them more liable to be robbed, injured or killed during the journey, and it makes them accept non-enumerated, sweated, or even illegal and low-paid work.

Criminalization not only reduces the gains to immigrants themselves, it is also likely to threaten the wages and conditions of already resident workers. Nothing is more damaging to the bargaining power of the working class as a whole as the existence of a significant fraction of it which suffers worse conditions, whose ability to organize is completely negated by their illegal status, and who live with the constant threat that their presence will be denounced to the authorities by employers or rivals. So it is by no means obvious that lifting immigration barriers would have a negative effect on wages and conditions in the labour market. And more positively it would enhance the possibility of drawing immigrant workers into the organizations of the labour movement.

## MIGRATION AGAINST IMPERIALISM

The history of migration is an important part of the history of imperialism. Imperialist expansion in many parts of the world went hand in hand with the forced migration of slaves and indentured workers. The havoc wreaked by imperialist occupation has made many areas of the world unable to support human life and so produced the conditions of more migration. The greatly increased inequalities produced by colonialism left a huge incentive for emigration when colonialism ended. The long series of alliances of convenience between imperialist countries and oppressive dictatorships in Third World countries has also increased the political pressures to migrate. A large share of today's asylum applicants are fleeing the actions of some government put or kept in power by the great powers of the international community. It is not possible to deny, let alone to roll back, the long



history of imperialism which has help to produce the pressures which today result in migration.

International migration at the start of the twenty first century is still intimately tied up with the main mechanisms of imperialism. The liberalization of immigration for highly skilled workers and international corporations reflects the needs of the protagonists in the increasing competitive struggles between capitalist powers in a very imperfectly globalized economy. The worsening of conditions of migration for poorer migrants and asylum applicants is one aspect of the polarizing tendencies of the world economy, partially but very inadequately compensated by the rising flow of migrants' remittances. The continued rise in migration, despite the fortresses and obstacles which confront them, is certainly part of the continuous incorporation of the whole world into the commodity economy. And immigration often leads to cultural assimilation and sometimes impoverishment. The realities of immigration, however, are not only part of imperialism but also an aspect of the struggle against it.

Immigration in part represents an assertion of rights to share in prosperity by those whom the fortresses seek to keep out. Immigration sometimes leads as much to cultural preservation, creativity and interchange as to cultural destruction. Migration often permits progressive citizens to survive the persecution of dictators. And, despite all the problems associated with it, it makes some contribution to breaking down the destructive traditions of ethnically based nationalism which have created or fuelled most of the conflicts of the last century and more.

The restriction of migration runs counter to the interests of poorer countries and poorer people and in some ways to the economic interests of the workers of developed countries. That does not mean that unlimited immigration is preferable to more balanced development of the world or to a more basic solution to the problem of

inequality and exploitation. But in the context of a capitalist world economy with virtually no commitment to the elimination of world poverty the freedom for all workers to move freely across borders increases equality. For that reason alone it is a freedom which socialists should defend.

Nevertheless, it is not enough to assert the abolition of borders as a socialist principle; a way needs to be found, especially in today's developed countries, to translate it into a set of policies which can command popular support. Such practical utopianism will need to focus on migration and citizenship laws, economic and welfare policy, anti-racism and foreign policy.

Dismantling the physical and bureaucratic barbed wire with which rich countries are increasingly surrounding themselves would contribute to meeting some needs of many poor and persecuted people. But their welfare also depends on the rights which they possess once borders are crossed. If it takes them a long time to acquire the same rights which existing inhabitants enjoy, then migrants will continue to suffer political persecution and economic super-exploitation which will also weaken sections of the existing resident working class. Immigrants should be able to gain full rights of access to work, protection by wages and hours legislation, to social services and benefits and full rights to organize. It is important for existing workers' and socialist organizations to support these rights for immigrants and to fight alongside them. Migration requires the development of a kind of portable citizenship, where citizenship is seen less as membership of a national community and more as endowment with a number of rights. It would help if formal citizenship were made easier to acquire. The rate of naturalization as a percentage of the estimated foreign population in recent years is nowhere very high: it is less than 3 per cent in Germany, Spain and the UK, more than 7 per cent in the Netherlands and Sweden with France

and the USA somewhere in between. Many migrants need to have dual nationality, which is becoming more possible (even in the USA), but again the pace of change is slow.

To contemplate the opening of borders is to confront the real state of the world – its conflicts, injustices and inequalities. Fears inevitably arise that more immigrants will simply mean more conflicts for a limited number of jobs and resources. The possibility of such conflicts cannot be wished away. But jobs and resources are not an unchangeable quantity. They are influenced by the economic policy, of firms, of states and of supra-national entities. The economic problems faced by large numbers of workers in developed countries during the last 25 years have resulted not from immigration but primarily from the neoliberal policies of privatization, deflation, labour market “flexibilization” and cutbacks in the social services. Attention has been focussed on reducing the financial cost of social policy not on the changes and expansion in social spending which are necessary complements of rising immigration. The insecurities of the sections of the non-immigrant working class most affected by neoliberalism have naturally been exploited by the racist right. It has been too easy to spread the idea that it is immigration which has been responsible for economic hardship. The governments responsible for the economic hardships have either tacitly allowed the connection to be made, or have sometimes argued it explicitly. What should be a conflict about economic policies with class at its centre has been converted into one about immigration policies with race and nationalism at its centre<sup>30</sup>. Governments could still, globalization notwithstanding, do a great deal through their economic policy to ensure that any growth in immigration does not threaten jobs, public services, housing standards and the environment.

There is no necessity that large scale immigration of people of other ethnic or national groups or colours will result in more racism and xenophobia. Pervasive as racism is in the world the worst inter-ethnic conflicts are not especially associated with recent immigration. They often occur after communities have lived together for centuries. But today immigration is exploited by racists to sow conflict. Although racism is not simply economically determined, it is likely that if employment and other economic policies work then many typical racist arguments will be more difficult to use. But it is impossible to imagine the racist and xenophobic threat being defeated without directly confronting it politically and ethically. Fears of conflict, opportunistically generated and not based on any real differences of interest, cannot be allowed to govern a society's policies on immigration.

Many of the situations which now produce forced migration and the need for asylum result directly and indirectly from the foreign policies of the countries which are now energetically trying to exclude immigrants. The ending of support for tyrannies and international economic policies which create greater inequality and obstruct the development of poor countries would reduce the pressures to emigrate from many countries. But socialists should be very clear that the purpose of foreign policies is not to reduce migration. Some proponents of more international aid have used that argument, but it tacitly accepts the anti-immigration prejudice. A less imperialist foreign policy would create fewer forced migrants. But, by encouraging more democratic societies, perhaps with more successful economic involvement with the rest of the world, with opportunities for education and more knowledge of the world, a less imperialist foreign policy might also create more voluntary migration. There is every reason for socialists to argue for a massive transfer of economic resources to poorer countries (though not in the form of what now passes for

development aid), but it should be on its own merits regardless of the effect which it has on the scale of migration.

Although some migrations reflect politically and economically pathological conditions and events in the world, migration in itself is not, as the anti-immigration coalition claims it to be, pathological. It can be part of a healthy, living cosmopolitan society. In particular it is a phenomenon which can help the world's working class to escape from the nationalist strait-jacket in which the intermittently cosmopolitan bourgeoisie has always tried to confine it.

There is another immediate reason why socialists should give priority to resisting immigration controls: immigration is threatening to become the central issue of politics in Europe, and a very important one elsewhere. Opposition to immigration is the leitmotif of the far right in all European countries; despite many oscillations in its fortunes, it has recently been gaining ground. In the last five years the extreme anti-immigration right has gained a foothold on power in several European countries: Austria, Denmark, Italy and the Netherlands. And in France the advance of the National Front has not ended with Le Pen's defeat in the presidential election. The vast majority of mainstream political thinking, of the so called centre right and centre left, rejects part of the rhetoric of the extreme right's project but increasingly adopts its content. Its response to ultra-right mobilization around immigration has been to implement a panic-driven programme of measures which criminalizes much immigration and vilifies many immigrants. Fortress Europe will lead to consequences which should be unacceptable to socialists. It can only be enforced by the militarization of borders, the worsening of conditions for many migrants and a growing number of deportations. Such a trend threatens not only immigrants but all citizens. It is impossible to repress one section of the population without repressing

others. And it will worsen relations between existing communities in Europe.

Fortresses are not by nature peaceful or democratic.

Immigration controls are a macrocosm of the pass laws of apartheid and the justifications for them which are given are the same in substance as those historically given by the ideologues of the white minority in South Africa. Yet South Africa has abolished its pass laws, while Europe is looking to strengthen them and seems even to be heading towards the establishment of a new kind of Bantustan for asylum applicants. Some European governments are already also envisaging making offering humanitarian assistance or refuge to illegal immigrants into a criminal offence.

Cosmopolitanism (the word so often used now by Le Pen and formerly by his infamous predecessors to characterise their enemies) seems to me integral to socialism, as it did to the two nineteenth century asylum seekers already quoted. They foresaw a socialist future in which those who did not own capital would build a cosmopolitanism to challenge and supersede that being constructed by those who did. Proletarian cosmopolitanism, the fight against imperialism and national separatisms, today means fighting for, among many other things, the end to the criminalization of poor people crossing borders. In a broader sense it remains a central weapon against the new imperialism (and the old).

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Many thanks to Andrew Glyn for comments on this article.

<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 1848, available at <http://www.anu.edu.au/polsci/marx/classics/manifesto.html>

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<sup>2</sup> For a detailed argument see Bob Sutcliffe and Andrew Glyn, 'Measures of globalization and their misinterpretation', in Jonathan Michie (ed), *The Handbook of Globalization*, London: Edward Elgar, 2003 (an extension and updating of the chapter of *Socialist Register 1992*, 'Global but leaderless? The new capitalist order')

<sup>3</sup> Angus Maddison, *The world economy: a millennial perspective*, Paris: OECD, 2001; World Bank, *World Development Indicators*, CD-ROM edition, Washington DC, 2002. These figures are measured at purchasing power parity.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Brenner, *The boom and the bubble*, London: Verso, 2002

<sup>5</sup> Sutcliffe and Glyn, 'Measures of globalization' and their misinterpretation'; UNCTAD, *World Investment Report 1993*, Geneva: UNCTAD, 1993; UNCTAD, *World Investment Report 2002*, Geneva: UNCTAD, 2002

<sup>6</sup> World Bank, *Global Development Finance 2003*, Washington DC: World Bank, 2003, p. 49

<sup>7</sup> Deon Filmer, *Estimating the world at work*, Background Report for World Bank World Development Report 1995, Washington DC: World Bank, Office of the Vice President Development Economics, 1995

<sup>8</sup> Vernon M. Briggs Jr., 'International Migration and Labour Mobility: the receiving countries', in Julien van den Broeck (ed.), *The Economics of Labour Migration*, Cheltenham, Glos and Brookfield, Vt: Edward Elgar, 1996

<sup>9</sup> Bob Sutcliffe, *Nacido en otra parte*, Bilbao: Hegoa, 1998

<sup>10</sup> Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York London Tokyo*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001

<sup>11</sup> For more details and a searching analysis see Stephen Castles, 'The international politics of forced migration', in Colin Leys and Leo Panitch (eds), *Socialist Register 2003*

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<sup>12</sup> John Willoughby, 'Ambivalent Anxieties: towards and understanding of the South Asian – Gulf Arab Labor Exchange', draft, 2000

<sup>13</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Preface to the Russian edition of *The Communist Manifesto*, 1882 available at <http://www.anu.edu.au/polsci/marx/classics/manifesto.html>

<sup>14</sup> Julian Simon, , *The Economic Consequences of Immigration*, Oxford and Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1989

<sup>15</sup> Philip Martin, *Bordering On Control: combating irregular migration in North America and Europe*, Geneva: International Organization for Migration, available for browsing at [www.iom.org](http://www.iom.org)

<sup>16</sup> Wayne Cornelius, 'Death at the Border: efficacy and unintended consequences of US immigration control policy', *Population and Development Review* 27 (4) December 2001, pp. 661–685

<sup>17</sup> All figures in this paragraph come from SOPEMI, *Trends in International Migration 2002 edition*, Paris: OECD.

<sup>18</sup> Edward Luce and Khozen Merchant, "Visas and the West's 'hidden agenda'", *Financial Times*, 9 April 2003; Alan Leshner, "America closes the door to scientific progress", *Financial Times*, 30 May 2003.

<sup>19</sup> Castles, 'International politics ...'

<sup>20</sup> Douglas Massey et al. 'Theories of international migrations: a review and appraisal', *Population and Development Review*, Vol. 19, No.3, September 1993

<sup>21</sup> Castles, 'International politics ...'

<sup>22</sup> Financial Times, 'UK Asylum proposals draw mixed reponse', *Financial Times* 29/30 March 2003; Alan Travis, 'Blunkett backed on asylum centres', *The Guardian*, 22 April 2003; Theo Veenkamp, Tom Bentley and Alessandra Buonfino, *People*



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*Flow: managing migration in a New European Commonwealth*, London: Demos, 2003, available at [http://www.demos.co.uk/uploadstore/docs/MIGR\\_ft.pdf](http://www.demos.co.uk/uploadstore/docs/MIGR_ft.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> Statewatch, Statewatch News on Line, September 2000, available at [www.statewatch.org/news/sept00/06nato.htm](http://www.statewatch.org/news/sept00/06nato.htm)

<sup>24</sup> Martin, *Bordering On Control*

<sup>25</sup> Sangatte, near Calais, was a temporary reception centre for asylum applicants to which the British government objected on the grounds that its proximity to the entrance to the Channel Tunnel facilitated illegal entries into the UK. After a long dispute between the British and French government it was finally closed in December 2002. A limited number were offered residence in the UK while the rest were redistributed to other parts of France.

<sup>26</sup> Bob Sutcliffe, 'A more or less equal world? The world distribution of income during the 20<sup>th</sup> century', *Indicators*, forthcoming

<sup>27</sup> Commission for the Study of International Migration and Cooperative Economic Development, *Unauthorized Migration: An Economic Development Response* Washington DC, 1990; Georges Tapinos, 'La coopération internationale peut-elle constituer une alternative à l'émigration des travailleurs?', *mimeo*, Paris: OCDE 1991

<sup>28</sup> Gregory DeFreitas, 'Immigration, inequality, and policy alternatives', in Dean Baker, Gerald Epstein and Robert Pollin (eds), *Globalization and Progressive Economic Policy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

<sup>29</sup> SOPEMI, *Trends 2002 edition*

<sup>30</sup> This point was elaborated by two articles in *Socialist Register 2003* (Betz and Flecker and Beynon and Kushnick).