

Canada's ruling elite embraces “Fortress Europe”-inspired anti-immigration policy

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The virulent anti-immigrant campaign of the Quebec political establishment and Canadian ruling class has taken another dangerous turn.

On a visit to France earlier this month, Quebec Premier and Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) leader François Legault called on the federal government to draw inspiration from Europe’s brutal anti-immigration policies to halve the number of asylum seekers in Quebec.

The expulsion of tens of thousands of refugee claimants to other provinces, as demanded by the Premier of Quebec, would constitute a form of mass deportation that would require the establishment on Canadian soil of an unprecedented state apparatus of control and surveillance.

Echoing the lie that has become the motto of the Quebec ruling class, Legault blamed the 160,000 asylum seekers in Quebec—which has a population of more than 9 million—for all the social problems wracking Canada’s only majority French-speaking province and portrayed them as a threat to the existence of the “Quebec nation:” “We have housing problems, we lack teachers and nurses. And more than a third, I think 40% of asylum seekers don’t speak French and settle in Montreal.”

He then called on Justin Trudeau’s federal Liberal government, which is responsible for processing asylum applications under Canada’s Constitution, to take its cue from “France among others” and “move” them into “waiting zones.”

Present in France, but also elsewhere in Europe, “waiting zones” are detention centres set up near airports, ports and train stations to imprison asylum seekers without trial as soon as they arrive, even before their asylum application process begins. In France, migrants can be detained in this way for up to 26 days, in contravention of international law and their fundamental rights. Similar large camps are to be found on Europe’s external borders, including in Greece.

With the support of the European Union’s border protection force, Frontex, European capitalism has created a “fortress Europe” aimed at preventing anyone fleeing persecution and poverty from reaching the continent. Among the methods employed are the use of illegal “pushbacks,” letting migrants drown at sea, and paying dictatorial regimes in North Africa to detain migrants in prison camps, in which slavery and other

abuses are rife.

Asked to clarify his remarks by stunned journalists, Legault confirmed that he was asking the Trudeau government to adopt the anti-immigration policies of European countries and deport asylum seekers from Quebec against their will: “What we want is for half of the asylum seekers currently in Quebec to be transferred to other provinces.”

Asked whether such a measure would violate the Canadian constitution’s Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Legault simply brushed the question aside, saying: “It’s up to the federal government to look at what’s being done elsewhere and find solutions.”

As Legault knows very well, “what is being done elsewhere” is a veritable war on immigrants involving forms of state-organized violence and reactionary policies not seen since the reign of authoritarian and fascist regimes over Europe in the 1930s.

The ruling classes—not only in Europe, but also in the United States and Canada—are seeking to turn immigrants into scapegoats for the ever-deepening social crisis caused by capitalism, and to use the manufactured furor over “illegal immigration” to justify a vast expansion of the repressive apparatus of the state.

The European Union and its member states have created militarized immigration infrastructure, squalid detention camps, and land and sea borders patrolled by heavily-armed security forces, and in North Africa violent militias that terrorize, brutalize and, in many cases, kill migrants seeking refuge.

It is estimated that more than 20,000 refugees have drowned in the Mediterranean Sea trying to reach Europe in the last decade, while European coastguards have attacked NGO ships attempting to rescue migrants. Dozens have drowned in the English Channel as a result of French and British policies, while Spanish border police have committed massacres by opening fire on groups of migrants.

In Italy, Greece, Germany, Spain and elsewhere, refugees are locked up in detention camps, in catastrophic conditions and at the mercy of the arbitrary violence of cruel guards. In England, refugees are imprisoned on disease-ridden prison ships.

Various governments have adopted laws and policies to facilitate mass deportations and send migrants back to their

countries of origin ravaged by war, poverty and climate change.

The criminality of the European authorities is all the more appalling given that the vast majority of asylum-seekers are trying to escape from countries in North Africa and the Middle East that have been destroyed by the wars and interventions of European imperialism and its allies in Ottawa and Washington.

To normalize these violent measures of repression, the ruling classes demonize immigrants using language traditionally associated with the extreme right. Neo-fascist parties that systematically engage in anti-immigrant incitement, like the neo-Nazi AfD in Germany and the Francoist Vox party in Spain, have been welcomed into parliament, and in the case of Italy, where Giorgia Meloni is prime minister, into government. The far-right increasingly sets the tone for the debate in the political establishment, above all regarding immigration policy.

A self-professed admirer of Mussolini and head of the far-right Brothers of Italy party, Meloni was accorded a warm reception from Trudeau and his Liberal government on a visit to Canada earlier this year.

In France, the “president of the rich,” Emmanuel Macron, allied himself with Marine Le Pen’s far-right Rassemblement National (RN) last year to push through a new immigration law that incorporated anti-immigrant measures long demanded by Le Pen. And he has just appointed a right-wing Prime Minister, Michel Barnier, who called in 2021 for a five-year moratorium on immigration to France.

Meanwhile in the US, the Republican presidential candidate and would-be dictator Donald Trump has made anti-immigrant agitation the focal point of his election campaign. In language reminiscent of the Nazi Party, he has declared that immigrants will “poison the blood of the nation,” referred to them as “animals” and promised, if elected, to use the military to expel more than 10 million migrants. He and his running mate J.D. Vance have used vile, totally unfounded rumours about Haitian immigrants in Ohio to incite hatred and violence.

Legault’s calls for the federal government to expel asylum-seekers to other provinces and jail them in flagrant disregard for international and Canadian law and the constitution’s Charter of Rights underscores that the ruling class in Quebec, and across Canada, is taking inspiration from these same far-right policies.

Since coming to power in 2018, the CAQ has intensified a turn by the entire political establishment towards far-right xenophobia and Quebec chauvinism. This has not stopped the Parti Québécois (PQ), under the leadership of Paul St-Pierre Plamondon, from constantly attacking the CAQ from the right, labelling it as insufficiently “nationalist” and demanding even harsher measures against immigrants and immigration.

As in Europe, where the social democratic and pseudo-left parties actively participate in the anti-immigrant campaign (even when they are in power, like Syriza in Greece, Podemos in Spain or the Left Party in Germany), there is no section of

the ruling class in Canada prepared to defend the right of asylum and democratic rights in general.

Québec Solidaire (QS), a pseudo-left party that speaks for the affluent middle classes and shares the PQ’s reactionary program for Quebec independence, presents the ruling class’s anti-immigration campaign as a “legitimate debate.” QS covers up for the PQ’s turn to the far right by denying that its xenophobic comments on immigrants are racist or “intolerant.” QS is itself proposing a reduction in immigration, lending credence to the lie that “excessive” levels of immigration are responsible for the collapse of public services, skyrocketing rents, and a surge in homelessness.

At the federal level, the Trudeau government, which is presented as a “progressive” and “immigrant-friendly” government by its allies in the NDP and the union bureaucracy, has demagogically declared that Legault’s demands are “unreasonable.”

But after a meeting with Michel Barnier, the new prime minister of France chosen undemocratically by Macron and the RN, Legault displayed a document from the Trudeau government showing that it too has referred to “European asylum models” in its discussions with the provinces.

In recent months, the Trudeau government has announced a series of measures to restrict immigration, while maintaining Canada’s reactionary temporary foreign worker program, which the UN Special Rapporteur has described as “fertile ground for contemporary forms of slavery.”

Under conditions in which the ruling class is united in its attacks on the most vulnerable in society, the defence of immigrants in North America is a fundamental responsibility of the Canadian and American working class, which must unite across differences of language and national origin to oppose war and austerity.

Its own future depends on it since the merciless war on immigrants is the spearhead of a reactionary assault by the ruling class on all workers and all democratic rights.



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