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A left-wing critique of the migration pact

Migration is a manifestation of inequality. But structural causes in a capitalist, globalised world are not addressed in the pact

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Shortly before the signing of the UN Global Compact for Migration on 10 and 11 December in Marrakesh, Germany's grand coalition, the Conservatives (CDU/CSU) and the Social Democrats (SPD), decided to introduce a motion in the German Bundestag. Its purpose was to emphasise that 'the migration pact serves German interests' and, importantly, that migration be organised, controlled and limited. The pact 'does not give rise to enforceable rights and obligations and does not have any law-changing or law-making effect,' states the motion submitted by the SPD and CDU.

This motion was preceded by an unprecedented failure of the Federal Government. During the negotiations on the migration pact, the public was left virtually uninformed. This made room for the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party to wage a scare campaign: it used nationalist rhetoric to warn people of mass immigration and an alleged loss of sovereignty. In turn, the AfD's fear campaign meant that a flagrant whitewashing was taking place on the other side which operated with patently false arguments, like claiming that the pact was establishing a way of controlling the causes of migration.

I was the only Member of the Bundestag to take part in the negotiations in New York. At that time, the other parliamentary groups' interest in the migration pact was – to phrase it diplomatically – not overwhelming. In all of my contributions, I've urged to include a right to not have to migrate, and to enshrine the specific fight against the causes of flight and migration in the pact. But the German Federal Government itself successfully opposed a change in its policy.

To sum it up in one sentence, the migration pact is nothing more than the continuation of Chancellor Angela Merkel's disastrous migration policy with the help of a UN political declaration. So it's not surprising that all of the African nations' demands to tackle the root causes of migration were rejected. Instead of global justice, the countries of the South have been experiencing a brain drain, the emigration of educated people.

No commitment was implemented to stop arms exports and the destruction of entire economies in the South through free trade agreements. On the contrary, the only agreements that were reached involved how to facilitate the recruitment of specialists from the countries of the South.

What the migration pact is actually about

The Federal Government recently led the Global Forum on Migration and Development for almost two years, focussing its work on the migration pact. Other global players have also been involved, including the World Economic Forum in Davos which brings together powerful politicians and even more powerful economic leaders each year.

Consequently, the pact is tailored to the needs of the North's industrial associations and intends to actively promote migration in a fundamentally positive light, while the negative aspects for the countries of the South remain under the radar. As expressed in Goal 5, the pact seeks to bring labour mobility into line with the needs of the target markets, the local demand for labour, and the skills supply. The private sector should be heavily involved in its implementation ('business mechanism'): it's more than significant that the service company Uber was involved in the negotiations on the migration pact.

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In Germany, employers' associations and their affiliated economic institutes (most recently the German Chamber of Industry and Commerce and the German Economic Institute) complain about a lack of skilled workers. Therefore, they are clamouring for more immigration, including from third countries, and increasingly in labour market segments with lower qualification requirements.

The trade unions and union-related economic institutes (e.g. the Hans-Böckler-Institut) have repeatedly demonstrated that the calculations of the employers' associations have been pulled out of thin air and are obviously driven by their interests.

The lack of opportunities

In Berlin alone, up through autumn of this year, nearly 3,500 applicants have not found a vocational training position. That's almost 50 per cent more than last year. The industry cynically laments school leavers' lack of training. Young people are deprived first of education, and then of training.

This above all affects young people with an immigrant background. Among the migrants living in Germany, one in four is without vocational training, and one in ten is without a school-leaving certificate. At the same time, employers are calling for skilled labour immigration from third countries. The OECD and the Bundesbank have pointed out that immigration, especially in low-skilled work in the lower salary groups, acts as a wage brake. And of these, people with an immigrant background are especially affected.

The brain drain paralyses economic development – alongside destructive free trade agreements and arms exports which are constantly creating new conflicts in the countries of the South. The migration pact promises employers in the industrialised countries a global extension of this worldwide allocation of labour, oriented towards wage minimisation.

Left-wing development sociologists from the South complain that with the emigration of trained young people, a transfer from south to north is taking place that may run into the billions. Up to 50 per cent of the academically educated are emigrating from countries of the South.

Thousands of physicians and nurses from countries in the South are working in Europe, while in their countries of origin, people are often short of medical care and die from simple illnesses due to lack of treatment. Even rudimentary care can be maintained only within the framework of development aid.

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At the very least, representatives of the South are demanding compensation from the North for the training costs paid. Unfortunately, in the migration pact there's no room for these issues. Instead, liberal development thinkers refer to the migrants' remittance transfers back to their families. They believe these should become less difficult. Although this beneficial for the affected families, the remittances have no demonstrable sustainable development effects.

The migration pact primarily serves the interests of German corporations to attract low-skilled labour in a cost-effective manner.

While they boost individual consumption, this is usually accompanied by additional imports, inflation, an increase in informal low-paid jobs, and the disappearance of well-paid jobs in the production of tradable goods. Not to mention the fall in productivity and worsening balance of payments.

The positive effect of increasing purchasing power cannot outweigh the negative effects. So far, there is no evidence that high return flows have triggered sustainable development. The criticism of international 'care chains', which are primarily at the expense of women in the countries of the South, is also not addressed in any way.

Moreover, governments and scientists from the South also criticise that the migration pact does not address combatting the causes of migration. Migration is a manifestation of inequality. However, its structural causes in a capitalist, globalised world are not analysed.

The pact, instead of carrying on a genuine fight against the causes of flight and migration, only proposes development measures, including the improvement of education and training. But in the absence of local economic development, this will likely lead to even more migration. For example, a different trade policy would be one decisive way to have an independent development that binds workers locally. Of course, in the migration pact there's no mention of this either.

The migration pact primarily serves the interests of German corporations to attract low-skilled labour in a cost-effective manner. Germany will not lose its sovereignty, nor will the door be opened to massive immigration. But the expropriation of the South through the recruitment of skilled workers will force more people to leave their homeland, since their lands are being destroyed in the interest of increasing short-term profits. The pact, even if it affirms the rights of migrants, serves primarily as a transmission belt of capital interests. Therefore, a left-wing critique of

the migration pact is nothing less than imperative.



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