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The Changing Face of Europe

Racism, Immigration and the Coming Police State

Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin

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Back in March of this year, I took a trip to Belgium [with a side-trip to Holland], which lasted for about ten days. This trip was extremely educational in that it let me see for the first time how many Africans and other peoples of color have moved into the European countries in the last 30 years since I had been there. During the 1960's when I was an American soldier based in West Germany, it was rare to see a black face among the sea of whiteness in Europe, with the only exceptions being France and England, which had substantial non-white immigration going at the time to fuel its service and mercantile industries. It needed those people then, but it does not feel it needs them now and have withdrawn the welcome mat.

Many of the major cities of Europe are now majority non-white, such as Amsterdam, which also has one of the largest Black ghettos in Europe. There is a substantial non-white population base [15-40%] in Lisbon, London, Brussels, Rotterdam, and others. Depending on whose statistics you accept, 10-12% of Europe itself is now non-white...and growing! I personally saw black people everywhere, and if you didn't know they spoke Dutch, French, Flemish or other European languages,

you would have thought you were in a black community anywhere in the US. When I did get to speak to them, they were extremely friendly, though somewhat guarded because of the political situation around immigration.

The European politicians feel that they have had enough of non-white immigration, now that all the hard work is done and black labor is no longer needed, and so have passed a series of repressive laws against 3rd world immigration. The most repressive of them is the Schengen Treaty adopted by the European Economic Community in 1985 [and just now being implemented] when the ideas of a European Union were first being discussed. This treaty covers immigration policies and the "free market" to be created among European nations. It is being implemented now, with these as being some of its features:

"Europol", a concentrated continental police force to patrol all the nations of Europe. It has immense power over immigrants and "surplus populations", such as radicals, poor people, gypsies, and the homeless. Relaxation of nation-state borders, in favor of one continent-wide border. This is very similar to the various states of the United States. "Fortress Europe: an alliance against U.S. economic, political and cultural domination, and plans to create a new superpower. Extremely tight immigration policies which criminalize and penalize non-white refugees especially. They are thrown into special immigration prisons called "transit centers" and black people are subjected to a new class of "suspicion" laws, which allow them to be stopped and questioned, even summarily arrested.

What the Schengen statutes did was usher in the type of police state that has been used against Black people in the United Kingdom for quite some time. These laws allow a police to stop a person in the streets and search their person or vehicle on mere suspicion, even makes it easier to enter a dwelling and search it and its inhabitants. It literally does away with the democratic rights of people of color, and give all power to the police. Couple that with the power to control immigration, or

have its primary objective be the disruption of the EEC over the operation of the laws. We managed to talk about a tourist boycott as one weapon we could use here, but the most potent weapon is to let people in America know there is both a problem and a large community of African peoples just like them in Europe. That, to me, is the number one thing, just to let people know here. We can certainly hookup with them, and give them maybe technical support and fraternal aid, but the reality is that they must fight the battles themselves. They pointed out to me that this type of struggle is how the BAI could really establish itself and win a powerful base in Europe and Africa. I think they are right, but we are such a young movement, I don't know how we could afford to send anyone there for any serious period of time, but this may not turn out to be that big of a problem. Main thing is that we must build our movement on a world scale, and to do that we must look for every opportunity to spread our ideas, and hop into such struggles to push them further to the Left and put them under the control of our people.

to stop a person [non-white people] to inquire about their immigration status, and you literally have a hunting status for black skins. In Britain, a disproportionate number of prison inmates are non-white people, and we can look for the same to be the case in Europe itself. Police brutality is also a problem in both the United Kingdom and Europe. Black people are routinely beaten and killed in France, Britain, and other parts of Europe with impunity, as a deliberate social control measure, just as is done in the USA.

In addition to the racist crimes of the state, Black people are subjected to racist paramilitary violence by neo-Nazis and other fascist scum elements. If we look at Europe alone, according to the anti-racist group, Youth Against Racism in Europe, there were 130,000 reported cases of racist attacks during 1995 in Britain. But the real figure, says YARE, is many times more.

But it is because of these racist repressive police controls and immigrant laws, the prisons are full of non-white "illegal immigrants" and political refugees from Western-backed dictatorships like Mobutu in Zaire[^]. The irony here is that Europe is a creation of Africa and Asia, and developed its wealth from the exploitation of our peoples. Its wanted high lifestyle is based on the sweat and blood of many generations of African and Asian peoples, yet they have adopted this morally self-righteous posture, which conquerors always adopt of "securing their borders against the heathens."

This makes a bad situation even worse, the immigrants and refugees have found it almost impossible to obtain employment. For instance, Blacks and Asians made up 5.6%, or 1-20 of the population of Britain, yet 31% of black males aged 16-24 years old are unemployed, almost twice the figures for young white males. The figures for young black women is 20% unemployment, while only 8% for white women in that age group. These figures are comparable to the rest of Europe, although in some countries it is even worse, because the government will

not give them license to work at all. Add to these figures that Europe has an official homeless rate of almost 3 million, many of whom are Africans.

In addition, many of them, even those who have lived in Europe for 20 years or more have absolutely no democratic rights that citizenship would bring. They cannot vote, enter certain professions, own small businesses in competition with local citizens, and they do not receive equal police protection. They are 2nd class citizens, who have no right that the white government is bound to respect. So they are prey to all the evils that capitalist society can bring on a vulnerable population, and have many of the same social problems, gangs, drug dealing, murder, and other ills that we face here in a deteriorating social system in the United States.

But all is not hopeless, the people are starting to fight back. Even with the severe repression by the state against immigrant and refugee populations, they are beginning to organize, although clandestinely at this stage. Anarchists and white radicals have set up a support network to help the refugees, and have several large demonstrations against the repression of the immigrants, but the reality is that until they come out in a continent-wide movement led by the immigrants themselves, it will not be possible to beat this racist repressive legislation. But in addition, there have been massive rebellions against police brutality in Portugal, Britain, France, Germany, and other countries, and mass demonstrations and other organizing against right-wing attacks, unemployment, and other ills. We can only expect to see more demonstration and rebellions, and ever more black militant movements come on the scene as the economy worsens and the scapegoating intensifies.

I had a meeting with a group of Africans in Belgium called "Truth", and also met with radical immigrant spokespersons in Holland, [Sister Njmelah especially, who interviewed me for a black radio show she hosted] and was impressed with

their desire to fight back. Their weakness is that they do not have similar contacts in each of the European countries, and it is hoped that a conference will be held soon to bring the activists together. It is very interesting that after I spoke publicly about the racist "segregation" laws which existed in the South before the coming of the American civil rights movement in the late 1950's and 60's, they compared the European immigration statutes to it and saw they could build a mass movement and win. But they also talked about transforming European society itself as well as dismantling the laws. They stated that they did not want to just win a few reforms and empower a black middle class, while so many remained in poverty. They had the radical goal of overthrowing capitalism itself.

Shortly after I came back to America, I learned that the Truth organizers had all been arrested by the Belgian secret police on "conspiracy" and illegal immigrant charges. Because of a demonstration to be held a week after their arrest, they were released but with a stern warning to desist their organizing. This, of course, was ignored, but they know they must be more careful.

There was intense interest in a Black Autonomy federation, and especially the idea of an international organization. They said they even hoped I or another BAI organizer would come back and work with them to build a mass continent-wide campaign against these repressive immigration laws and racist police brutality. In fact, there was some talk of building a BA newsbureau to either distribute news to the U.S. about Europe or to do a European edition of the newspaper. They really did like it, that was sure evident. They didn't have any money to buy one, but when I gave them some copies for their study group, they made sure everybody got to see it, even translated it into French for those who didn't read English.

So what do I think of the overall situation? It is clear to me that a mass movement is clearly necessary to make the EEC rescind this legislation. In fact, I think this mass movement would