

Europe's Anti-Immigration Left

Daniel Pipes

In general, Europe's Left favors immigration, but important developments suggest possible changes ahead.

Since the end of World War II, Europe's Left overwhelmingly viewed the free movement of labor and immigration as the best way to challenge corporate interests; in the words of progressive writer [David Adler](#) (on whose article, "Meet Europe's Left Nationalists," I have relied here), these "hastened the pace of history and heightened capitalism's contradictions."

Accordingly, the Left helped build the European Union and then pass the 1985 Schengen Agreement (that virtually eliminated internal borders among 26 European countries with a population of more than 400 million). It also enthusiastically welcomed non-Europeans, an approach that culminated in 2015-16 with Angela Merkel (a leftist in conservative disguise) taking in a million-plus migrants, mostly from the Middle East, who were met in Germany by a *Willkommenskultur*, or welcoming culture.

That massive influx, and especially the Islamists among them, stimulated a backlash among the Left's historic base, the workers, leading them to desert it in favor of once-marginal anti-immigration and anti-Islamization parties, the ones I call [civilizationist](#). These parties, with their mix of generous social benefits and strong border controls, are gaining throughout Europe to the point that they have

wielded real power in five governments (those of Poland, Czechia, Hungary, Austria, and Italy).

Getting elected, leftists increasingly realize, means making what Adler calls a “momentous turn” away from both the single European labor market and migration from outside Europe; this doublet, they recently discovered, “encourages exploitation, erodes community, and denies popular sovereignty.” Left nationalists criticize the free movement of labor for several reasons: economic (jobs lost, wages undercut), cultural (loss of solidarity, xenophobia), and political (an elite project not endorsed by the masses).

In a startling turn-around, open borders are now seen as harming working-class interests while strict border controls assure workers’ rights. The nation, long seen as a bourgeois project, has become a shield for workers against the perils of globalism. In this spirit, leading leftists in all three of Europe’s largest, most influential countries call for limiting the free movement of labor:

United Kingdom: [Jeremy Corbyn](#), the former Labour Party leader, shadow prime minister, and hard-leftist, says that “Labour is not wedded to freedom of movement for EU citizens as a point of principle” and calls for the “reasonable management” of immigration after Brexit based on UK economic needs. His colleague [Diane Abbott](#) puts it more simply: “Real border security... is what Labour stands for.”

France: [Jean-Luc Mélenchon](#), leader of the La France Insoumise (France Unbound), a populist party, and the Left’s outstanding figure, denounces seconded employees from other European Union countries as “stealing the

bread” of French workers. He lauds the [French flag and national anthem](#) (rather than their socialist counterparts) as “revolutionary symbols,” a dizzying shift.

Germany: [Sahra Wagenknecht](#), co-leader of Die Linke (The Left) party, spoke out against that welcoming of over a million migrants in 2015-16, against open borders, and against granting migrants unlimited access to work in Germany. She founded an organization (Aufstehen, or Stand Up) to forward these ideas and it has touched a nerve, with more than one out of three Germans potentially favoring its tough approach.

But [Denmark](#) is the country to watch. Its Social Democratic party presents the starkest example of left-wing anti-immigration sentiments. Its leader, Mette Frederiksen, ran on a platform in 2019 that “the price of unregulated globalization, mass immigration and the free movement of labor is paid for by the lower classes.” Her party called for a cap on “non-Western immigrants,” for illegal immigrants to be expelled to North Africa, and for immigrants to have to work 37 hours a week. The Social Democrats also voted in favor of a law allowing jewelry to be stripped from refugees as well as a burqa and niqab ban. Since coming to power in 2019, Frederiksen has carried out her promises. In particular, Denmark accepted a mere 1,547 asylum seekers in 2020 and she has announced the goal of admitting [zero asylum seekers](#) in 2021. On March 9, the Danish parliament overwhelmingly passed a new law banning foreign governments from [financing mosques](#) in the country.

Of course, the nationalist version of socialism is hardly a novel idea but goes back to Benito Mussolini in Italy, who responded to the passions of World War I with an ideology he called fascism; more transparently, Adolf Hitler rode the National

Socialist German Workers' Party, or Nazi party, to absolute power. Recalling those monsters, the current trend meets severe criticism; for example, [Matt Qvortrup](#) of Coventry University condemns Wagenknecht's fusion of anti-immigration policies with populist economics as "a dangerous mix."

In contrast, I find the new iteration of left nationalism encouraging: Europe, the America, and Oceania need the Right and Left to cooperate in limiting massive non-Western immigration that threatens to overwhelm and even eliminate Western civilization.

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