

Germany expelling thousands of Bosnian refugees

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It could hit your neighbour, your children's school friends or a colleague who has been working next to you for years: Germany is currently carrying out the expulsion of Bosnian refugees. Over 100,000 Bosnians have already returned and by the end of 1998 the remaining 230,000 people from Bosnia still living in Germany will have to leave. Nearly all of them came seven years ago when the war in Yugoslavia spilt over into Bosnia-Herzegovina and threatened to destroy their existence.

The German state of Hessen is a clear example of what is happening. Boekel (SPD), the Hessian minister of the interior, announced May 26 that 11,000 refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina would be sent back home in the next weeks. Only those who had school-age children were allowed to stay until the end of the current school year, in July.

To cut off every possibility for Bosnians to continue living in Germany, the first step is to deprive them of jobs. As early as the end of September 1997 the employment offices were given instructions to systematically withdraw the work permits for Bosnians. Thousands of Bosnians, many of whom had worked in Germany for years, received duplicated forms, in generally restrained wording, notifying them that the employment centres had to first check whether there was a German available for the job. The notification was usually combined with the order for them to break off the employer-employee relationship straight away. Employers were even threatened with fines of up to 100,000 marks if they continued employing Bosnians.

At the end of March 1998 approximately 2,000 of the 7,664 refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina living in Frankfurt had already left the country. In Offenbach, near Frankfurt, there are another 2,000 Bosnians awaiting deportation. A number consist of families with school-age children. Two of these families spoke with reporters for the *World Socialist Web Site*.

A leather worker and his wife

The Tuzlak family originates from Modrica in the Serbian part of Bosnia, 20 kilometres from the Croatian border. Serb refugees from Croatia now live in their house. Mrs Tuzlak, a Serb, could return, but her Croat husband could not.

Germany has become Tuzlak's second home since he worked for nine years in the leather industry in Offenbach from 1972 to 1981. Then he became self-employed in his home country by opening a leather shop. When war broke out, his old boss rang him: 'Come

back to Offenbach until it is over, we could do with you here.' 'I was happy then to at least have escaped from the war,' the worker said.

Five years later he has become almost indispensable to his boss as a leather goods technician. And then this: 'After 33 years of work I'm suddenly sitting at home on so-called 'forced holiday.' It really is a funny feeling.' The job centre in Offenbach had told his boss on October 12, 1997 that his work permit had been withdrawn. If the company continued to employ him it would have to pay 100,000 marks.

'This refusal was a big shock to me,' Tuzlak said. 'The residence permit for Germany expired on March 31. That can only mean that they now want to get rid of us--the quicker the better.'

'No one needs to tell me that I have to go back home, that was clear to me from the very start,' he continued. No one needs to deport him, he said, but returning is nearly impossible at the moment. Following the Dayton treaty the area where the couple's house is situated now belongs to the Serbian-controlled part of Bosnia. Tuzlak explains: 'My wife is an Orthodox Serb, I am Catholic. We can't return there together at the moment; we wouldn't be accepted. And how would we send away the people who are still living in our house?'

The Tuzlaks have the impression that their hands have been tied because, without any possibility of work, any chance of personal initiative has been taken from them. They find it grotesque that they have always worked as long as their right of residence was secure, but now they have to trail off to the job centre. Mrs Tuzlak commented: 'I have never lived from any sort of state support. Now I feel as if I were in prison.'

The only possibility to work in any way and earn money consists in Mrs Tuzlak going to clean in a butcher's shop two hours a day. Even for the permit to do this they had to wait three months. And of course they cannot live on this meagre income.

'Every person has the right to work,' Mr Tuzlak thinks. 'It is taken from us by force in order to get rid of us. It seems to me as if it were like before with the Jews. I feel degraded, like a second class person. They can simply take our work permits away and say: Sorry, but it's the turn of others before you. That hurts. You have the impression you have no human rights anymore. After all, the war in Yugoslavia isn't my fault.'

A family of five

The Mulahusic family came to Germany a few months before the war broke out and have now lived in Germany for seven years. Ten-year-old Aldjana speaks better German than Serbo-Croat. Until the end of last year, they felt relatively secure since both parents had steady jobs and their residence permits were always renewed. Now the situation has suddenly changed.

Mr Mulahusic must 'suspend' his steady job as a heating installer because his work permit was taken away from him. Mrs Mulahusic also had her work permit taken away without a word of warning. She may still work as a cleaner, but for just two hours a day. Both have applied for the renewal of their work permits and have already been waiting eight weeks for a decision to be made--an impossible situation.

The next shock came when their residence permit had to be renewed on January 31. They were given a visa which expires in September 1998. They were told they would receive notification to leave the country 'of their own free will' within three months. After this deadline they are threatened with deportation.

Mr Mulahusic worked as a heating engineer, taking care of all the installation, plumbing and painting work for his boss, an owner and estate manager of several residential buildings. The employer has not sacked him and told the job centre he was not prepared to employ anyone else. But the job centre has been totally unimpressed.

The Mulahusic family has three children. The oldest is the 17-year-old Fuad who is in the 10th form at the Bachschule and was recommended by his teachers for the Rudolf Koch School. Fuad would have liked to start an apprenticeship as a shopkeeper. He already had an interview, having passed an entrance exam with 'very good' (the best grade). However, when it was learned that Fuad came from Bosnia, he was not admitted despite his good qualifications. He knows other young Bosnians who had already started an apprenticeship and must now drop out. Fuad, like his 10-year-old sister Aldjana, only knows the schools in Offenbach. Aldjana was two years old when the family moved from Zaviwar to Offenbach.

The parents are afraid of going back, above all because of the children. They only wish for their children what all other parents in the world wish for: that they grow up in safety and receive a good education. To return without any money to a country where there are no job prospects means that they may not even be able to finance the books and travelling costs for them to attend school.

On top of this there is another concern: a completely new way of teaching history has been introduced in the schools. As Mrs Mulahusic explains: 'Each side writes its own version of history: Croats, Serbs and Muslims--they will keep on pestering the children. Neither side is satisfied with the Dayton Treaty. How long will it go well? That is also why we are frightened.'

Mr Mulahusic adds: 'For me, no party counts which only accepts one nation. Nationalism is the main problem that caused this terrible war. But an open discussion isn't possible at all there at the moment.'

He paid a visit to Bosnia before last winter to test the situation. 'In the village I was born there are three different police units within a radius of 30 kilometres--a Muslim, a Croat and a Serb one. The area is strictly divided according to ethnic origin. Every

10 kilometres the territory's sovereignty changes--and they are all heavily armed.'

Of their house in the Bosnian-Croat half of Bosnia in the canton of Zenica Deboja, there is not much more left than a roofless and damp ruin. Mr Mulahusic and his brother covered up the roof temporarily with a plastic awning, but the family can't live there. 'Much as I'd like to, I can't see how I could rebuild and do up the house under the present circumstances,' he said.

Mrs Mulahusic explains: 'Every one of us would of course like to go back at one point, it is our home after all. But at the moment it is absolutely impossible. We would have no chance of getting work because the home-comers from Germany are the last ones to get a job. Everyone there thinks we became rich in Germany. But we cannot even take the furniture we have here with us, unless we pay a high amount of money at the border for it. We came here with two bags and we are supposed to return with two bags.'

The Mulahusic family feel that being deprived of the possibility of working is particularly degrading. 'We were never a burden to the state,' declared Mrs Mulahusic. 'On the contrary, some years we both paid together up to 10,000 marks income tax. There are 2,000 Bosnians like us in Offenbach who have worked up to now and paid taxes. Who will benefit if we are all unemployed now? We are forced to go to the job centre.'

However, unemployment benefits are hardly enough to pay the rent, and this means they will have to go to the social welfare office. Said Mr Mulahusic: 'And then, they can deport us straight away.'

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