

# Berlin protest against inhuman treatment of refugees in Germany

Our correspondents  
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For nearly three weeks, dozens of refugees have been camping out in a central square in Berlin to protest against their barbaric treatment by the German state. The protest camp is supported by refugee organizations such as the Voice and Karawane, which have links to the semi-anarchist anti-fa (anti-fascist) milieu. The protest itself has also been joined by many supporters who are not directly affected by Germany's anti-foreigner policy.

The action began almost two months ago in Würzburg, southern Germany, when a group of 20 refugees set off to march the 600 miles to Berlin. The group was protesting against a German law that prohibits asylum-seekers from leaving their place of residence and strips them of the right to move freely in Germany. On their way to the capital, the group was joined by other victims of German asylum law and a total of 70 refugees eventually arrived in Berlin.

There they were greeted by a solidarity demonstration involving over 5,000 people—exceeding the expectations of the organizers. Banners bore slogans declaring: “Deportation is murder” and “No person is illegal”. Participants chanted “the right to reside anyway” and called for solidarity with the refugees.

Following the protest, some demonstrators occupied the Nigerian Embassy to protest against the country's cooperation with Germany's deportation policy. The occupation was broken up by police, with protesters complaining of excessive use of force by police using batons to disperse demonstrators.

Prior to the demonstration, asylum-seekers had written an appeal in which they summarized the goals of the protest. “We are refugees from various regions of the world”, they wrote. “We all fled in search of freedom and humanity. Contrary to the promises made, we found neither in Europe or Germany. Following the suicide of one of our fellow-sufferers, we decided to no longer tolerate our marginalization and disenfranchisement by the German government.”

Refugees described the common practice in the treatment of refugees in Germany. Victims are deprived of all basic human rights: they must remain in one location due to the stipulation of compulsory residence, often forced to live in inhuman conditions and banned from taking a job to earn a living. Many are tempted therefore to undertake illegal work under the most extreme forms of exploitation. Their lack of a residence permit deprives them of any employment rights.

In July of this year, the German Constitutional Court declared that the 20-year-long practice of awarding asylum-seekers financial support well below the basic rate of welfare support is unconstitutional and violates the basic right to humane subsistence.

This practice goes back to the virtual abolition of the right to asylum by all of Germany's leading parties in 1993, the Christian Democratic Union, the Free Democratic Party and the Social Democratic Party. One component of the asylum law introduced at that time was the systematic deterrence of refugees. They were deliberately treated in an inhumane manner in order to minimize the number of asylum applications. In

addition, the new law heavily restricted the right to apply for asylum,.

Further restrictions to the right of asylum, together with increased repression and controls at external borders of the European Union, have led to a drastic reduction in the numbers of asylum-seekers in recent years. In 2011, 45,741 persons applied for asylum in Germany. Only 1.5 percent of this total were successful in their claims for asylum. About 55 percent of applicants were deported immediately—often under brutal conditions. Others received a temporary residence permit and were able to delay their deportation for a few months.

The increased security at the EU's external borders means that many seeking to immigrate to Germany are not even allowed to enter Europe. Thousands of people will have access to Europe, and even the right to apply for asylum, denied. Estimates also assume that at the external borders of Europe since 1988, more than 18,500 refugees lost their lives in an attempt to get past the border regime in a country of asylum. Major causes of death are dehydration and drowning.

At the demonstration in Berlin refugees told reporters from the WSWS about their fate in Germany and the reasons why they were participating in the protests.

Kofi is 34 years old and comes from Ghana, where he worked as a computer technician. He fled Ghana due to political persecution. Kofi resides in a home in Wismar and awaits the processing of his asylum petition. He said that there are German companies in Ghana and many business people who live and work freely. "I wonder why in Germany I was not able to freely pursue my profession", he said. "I think that every person should be able to build a life in this world, wherever they are. I want to have a future!"

Yonas comes from Ethiopia. When riots began there in 2005, he fled to Germany by air. He is 28 years old and used to live with his family, who sold household items. Yonas is currently housed in a refugee camp in a Bavarian village, where he feels very isolated.

After a year of waiting, his asylum application had been rejected. He received only a tolerated status and is now working for a pittance at McDonald's. For two years he has lived with other men in a room. "I just want to be treated as a human being", he said, "as an entity that has the same rights as all other people in Germany".

Jean Pierre came alone from Guinea to Germany when he was 18. He is now 23 years old, has no family here and lives in a home in a secluded place in Bavaria. Due to restrictions against asylum-seekers in Bavaria, he is left with only about €135 (US\$175) a month in pocket money. It took two years before he was allowed to study. He now has his diploma and works as a kitchen assistant at a food supplier for hospitals.

The situation of refugees has greatly worsened in recent years, not only in Germany but throughout Europe. Immigrants often serve as scapegoats to divert attention from social attacks on the working class and the moves by state powers to suppress protests. The defence of immigrants' rights is an integral part of the defence of the social and democratic rights of all workers in Europe.



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