

# Asylum seekers occupy trade union headquarters in Munich

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For nearly a week, 55 asylum seekers have occupied the headquarters of the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB) in Munich. The refugees are protesting against their inhumane treatment under Bavaria's asylum policy, and are demanding the abolition of food parcels, compulsory residence and the ban on working. They had previously demonstrated for two weeks across Bavaria.

According to police sources, around 750 refugees and their supporters marched through Munich city centre on Tuesday. A woman collapsed during the demonstration and was taken to hospital. Later in the evening, neo-Nazis intervened in the protest march, which the police then used as a pretext to halt the protest at around 22:00. The refugees subsequently hid in the trade union building.

The refugees saw the occupation of the trade union building in Munich's city centre as the last chance to continue their protest. The refugees and their supporters had no other option but to remain in the DGB building to protect themselves and their lives, organisers of the demonstration stated on Wednesday.

The demonstrators set out in two groups on August 20 from the towns of Bayreuth and Würzburg, with the aim of meeting in the Bavarian state capital. Both groups were accompanied by massive police patrols, who employed ruthless methods. Two participants continue to receive medical treatment for their injuries.

"Almost every day the police checked and sometimes harassed us," a refugee told the *Junge Welt* newspaper. He described a police check near Freising, where seven participants were injured. Only 9 of the 50 refugees could continue the march. "The others were arrested and sent back to the appropriate camp," he added.

Alexander Thal of the Bavarian council for refugees

described another attack by the police to the newspaper. He was a witness as one of the protest groups arrived in the Munich district of Feldmoching and was violently dispersed by support commandos of the Bavarian police. "It was a disgusting, almost haunting sight," declared Thal.

The *Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung* spoke with Ghلام Vali, who was taken to hospital after the police action before being returned to the asylum camp Hauzenberg near Passau. "The police hit me and pushed my head roughly on the road," stated Vali. "I had a sharp pain in my eye and my back was sore."

Conditions for refugees in Germany, and in Bavaria in particular, are catastrophic, driving ever more asylum seekers to take protest action. This became especially clear during a hunger strike two months ago by asylum seekers at Munich's cattle market.

The desperate hunger strike by around 50 refugees was eventually violently brought to an end and the camp was cleared. The hunger strike lasted for a week. It not only revealed the desperate situation facing refugees, but also how the established parties respond. None of them, including the trade unions, supported the refugees and their related demands.

Bavaria's interior minister Joachim Herrmann (Christian Social Union, CSU) denied that the refugees had any right to protest and sought to criminalise them. He declared that foreigners in Germany did not enjoy the basic rights of protest and assembly, which were only guaranteed for German citizens.

Munich's mayor Christian Ude, the Social Democrats' candidate in the state election against state president Horst Seehofer (CSU) in two weeks, is well known for his radical stance against refugee protests. He ordered the clearing of the protest camp at the cattle market, cynically justifying this by claiming it would

save lives.

During the latest protest, the leader of the Greens in the Bavarian state parliament, Ulrike Gote, criticised Herrmann for the police interventions against the refugees' march. She accused the interior minister of seeking to set an example during the election campaign. She called for the temporary removal of the compulsory residence rule to allow the protests to take place.

In fact, this is pure hypocrisy. The Greens have collaborated with Ude and the Social Democrats in the state parliament in Munich, supporting their right-wing asylum and immigration policies. On a national level, they are also striving for a coalition with the Social Democrats.

The Left Party also does not represent a fundamentally different position. Orhan Akman, a deputy in the state parliament, supported the ending of the hunger strike at the cattle market and expressly praised "Ude's efforts."

The DGB has made it clear it objects to the refugees remaining on its property and that it does not support the protest. Last Thursday afternoon, Matthias Jena, the chair of the DGB in Bavaria, sought to persuade the refugees to leave the DGB's building in a personal discussion. He explained that the DGB supported their demands, but could not accommodate them any longer because the trade union building was not a motel.

Jena stated to the press, "I have urgently requested that the refugees do not over-test our hospitality."

Jena offered the refugees a move to a youth camp, "The Tent", at the expense of the DGB. If they don't accept this "offer," trade union officials have threatened that the police will disperse them. The police already stated last Thursday that they would intervene as soon as the property owner was no longer prepared to accommodate the refugees.



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