

Asylum seekers set up camps in German cities

Berlin: “Refugees continue to die due to the NATO war in Libya”

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Two weeks after the death of hundreds of refugees off the coast of the Italian Mediterranean island of Lampedusa, the true nature of the European Union has been sharply exposed. Politicians of all stripes feign horror over the fate of thousands of people who have lost their lives crossing the Mediterranean. At the same time, in order to discourage further migrants and intimidate the working class as a whole, they are viciously persecuting survivors who have managed to cross the borders of “Fortress Europe”.

The situation for refugees is especially dramatic in Germany. In a number of German cities refugees have set up encampments that house dozens, sometimes hundreds of refugees, often under catastrophic conditions. In Hamburg, about 80 refugees, many of whom made the dangerous journey from Libya to Lampedusa and are known as the “Lampedusa in Hamburg”, have been put up in St. Pauli Church.

Last Friday the Social Democratic Senate reacted when church authorities announced plans to place containers with heating and toilets on the grounds of the church to house the refugees over the winter. The Senate mobilized the police to commence a campaign of harassment of the refugees. Police helicopters have circled over the church and police in plainclothes comb the area to identify and arrest refugees for deportation. Based on the practice of “racial profiling”, the police check the papers of all dark-skinned people in the centre of the city.

In Berlin, 30 refugees are conducting a hunger strike in the open at the city’s famous Brandenburger Gate. (See “Asylum seekers in Berlin on hunger strike”) More than 100 other refugees, mainly from Africa, set up a tent camp a year ago in the suburb of Kreuzberg. Their camp lacks the most basic facilities. There is no provision of food and the refugees are dependent on

donations. There are no proper toilet or hygiene facilities and the inhabitants of the camp, forced to sleep in the damp cold winter, have no proper access to medical care. Many of the refugees fled Libya in 2011 following the NATO bombing of the country.

The district council, under Green Mayor Monika Herrmann, has offered a home to house the refugees, but the residents of the camp are skeptical. Some see it as an attempt to divide the political center they have built up in Berlin. On Wednesday, a group of the Berlin refugees tried to draw attention to their plight by blocking the road with a wooden bench.

WSWS reporters spoke at the Kreuzberg camp with Victor, who originally came from Nigeria before moving to work in Libya:

“Prior to the NATO bombing I worked in Libya for 12 years. I was one of many African workers who came to the country to work. I was active in the construction industry. I lived in Misrata, worked hard and was able to earn a good living while I was there. That all changed in 2011 when NATO, France and America commenced the bombing of the country. It was a terrible experience for me and all of those I knew. NATO has the blood of innocent citizens on its hands. They killed ordinary citizens and even children with their bombs. I had friends and colleagues who were victims of the bombs. I personally witnessed such deaths.

“NATO incited the civil war which then wrecked the country and is still going on today. The Western forces encouraged and armed the rebels, who began pogroms against immigrant workers. The rebels would cut off your head if they found you. Misrata was too unsafe and I fled to Tripoli with my wife. We had to leave my house and most of my belongings behind. When the rebels advanced into Tripoli Libyan soldiers sent us to

the port, and said we would only be safe if we left the country.

“I then commenced a seven-day journey by boat across the Mediterranean, setting off at the end of May. I was forced to leave my wife behind. I do not know up until this day what has happened to her. There were 800 of us onboard the ship. For the entire trip we had no food or water. We were forced to leave all our belongings behind. After six days the boat capsized and hundreds of those onboard were drowned. I was one of those who was rescued and was brought to Lampedusa, where the people there tried to do what they could to help us.

“After a short time on Lampedusa the survivors were transferred to various camps on the Italian mainland. I ended up in a large camp near Milan run by Caritas, where I stayed for nearly a year. All this time our applications for asylum were ignored by the authorities. We had a roof over our heads but nothing more. It was as if we did not exist. At the start of this year the Italian authorities then declared that the emergency situation in North Africa was over and disbanded the refugee camps throughout Italy. Overnight 30,000 refugees were put out onto the street. We had to sleep out in the open with no protection. We were given a paper allowing us to stay for six months. Many refugees tried to leave for other countries but were then sent back to Italy, which according to European law is responsible for them because we landed on the Italian coast.

“In January this year I came to Berlin, but my situation is no better. We came here to work. You can only win respect if you work. We do not want charity, we want a chance to do something constructive for society. But we are also ignored by the authorities here. We sleep in tents in the damp and the cold. We are tired and hungry. All we can do is fight and demonstrate for our rights.”

I asked Victor about the significance of the slogan on the refugees’ banner, which reads: “2011-2013—Libya-Lampedusa-Berlin—Still under NATO bombing”.

Victor replied: “We want to make the point that people are still continuing to die because of the NATO bombing. They are dying in Libya, and refugees driven from the country are dying here in Europe and Germany of starvation and neglect. We have no protection.

“The Western countries talk about humanity, but in

Libya they did not want to save humanity but destroy it. The real reason for the war was oil and the assets that Libya possesses. Because of NATO the country will never have peace. And now the Americans and the French are using the money they pillaged from Libya to buy arms for the rebels in Syria, where the same thing is happening with the same result: civil war and a mass exodus of the people. Europe must assume responsibility for its crimes.”



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