

German state parliament persecutes refugees

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For many years, measures against asylum seekers have been systematically strengthened in Germany. The state government in Hamburg, controlled by the Social Democratic Party (SPD), has played a leading role in this. The state government has withheld basic necessities of life from refugees, and systematically promoted hatred against black people to intimidate asylum seekers and force them to leave.

In February of this year, 350 immigrants came to Hamburg from Italy. They had been left stranded for more than two years on the island of Lampedusa. They had fled there in 2011 in order to escape violence in Libya as a result of the NATO war. The African migrants worked on the Libyan oilfields, among other industries. Most of the men came from Ghana, Mali and the Ivory Coast.

They travelled to Hamburg with papers provided by the Italian government, along with €500 in cash. From the beginning, the declared goal of the SPD was to deport the refugees back to Italy.

After holding talks, the demands of the refugees were rejected by the city's mayor, Olaf Scholz, Interior Senator Michael Neumann and Detlef Scheele, senator for social affairs, who are all SPD members.

After briefly being accepted into the city's winter emergency programme, the refugees were thrown onto the street in April. At that time, they had authorisation to stay in the Schengen area for three months. They are not allowed to work in Germany and have no right to receive social welfare or accommodation. They lived on the streets at first, but they have received strong support from Hamburg residents over recent months.

In June, the church in the St. Pauli parish provided accommodation for 80 refugees in the church. School pupils in the district near the harbour intend to give the migrants access to their sports hall over the winter, where the refugees can use showers, toilets and a heated room. The SPD state government has opposed

even this minimal aid.

Instead, they have done everything to make the lives of the refugees unbearable in order to force them to leave. At the end of September, the state Senate refused to allow the refugees to receive assistance from the city's winter emergency programme. In addition, the authorities banned the church from setting up heated containers on their land. Scholz and Neumann threatened that this could be a punishable offence for assisting illegal residence.

Three weeks after the federal elections and only a few days after close to 400 people died in the Lampedusa catastrophe, the police began a targeted operation against black Africans. Helicopters flew over the city, and the police stopped every pedestrian with black skin in order to locate those without papers.

This practice breaches fundamental rights. It is explicitly banned in the constitution to discriminate against individuals based on their skin colour. The racial profiling practiced by in the police crackdown initiated by the state Senate is clearly in breach of this provision.

Several refugees have been forced to identify themselves to the police, with one even being made to give his fingerprints.

The refugees have to date not provided the authorities with their names and identities, because they justifiably fear immediate deportation. Under the Dublin II agreement, the country where the refugees first entered Europe is responsible for them. In the case of the Lampedusa migrants it is Italy. Consequently, the migrants would have to turn to the Italian authorities to consider their asylum applications. However, they have already done this, with the result that their applications were rejected. Neumann, the senator for the interior, has been demanding that the refugees leave the country.

"We fled from war and massacres in Libya," said a member of the Lampedusa group at a public meeting in

Hamburg. “Several million migrants could live there with dignity before the war (led by NATO in 2011). It is hard to understand, why in a country which proclaims to be democratic there is no willingness to assist 350 refugees in an emergency humanitarian camp. Instead we are controlled and criminalised.”

This is precisely the goal of the state government. The SPD is using the issue of refugees to suspend basic democratic rights and build up the structures of the state, which can then be employed against the working class as a whole. An example is being made of the migrants. Scholz has declared repeatedly that there is no long-term perspective for the refugees in Hamburg.

Scholz, who is also the vice chairman of the national SPD, won a reputation as a “hardliner” in 2001 as interior senator. At that time he introduced the forcible administration of medication to drug dealers to induce vomiting in order to secure evidence from suspects. Scholz held firm, even after a drug dealer died as a result of these measures in December 2001.

The law-and-order stance of the SPD will play a central role in the grand coalition government. It is no accident that Scholz, along with current finance minister Wolfgang Schäuble, is a leader of the important finance working group in the negotiations over a future government. The massive social attacks that will be discussed and decided within this group can only be imposed upon the population by state violence.

In Hamburg, a large movement in the population has developed against the build-up of the state apparatus and the inhumane treatment of refugees. Last Friday, 10,000 people gathered after a game involving the local club FC St. Pauli for a rally before the stadium. Subsequently, the football fans, refugees and city residents marched to the St. Pauli church to protest against the treatment of the migrants at the hands of the SPD state government.

The SPD relies on the Left Party, which has eight deputies in the state Senate, to suppress this movement. The Left Party has repeatedly tried to place itself at the head of the protest, in order to direct it into safe channels. The party could understand the fear of the state government about more migrants, said Christiana Schneider, the spokeswoman for the Left Party on domestic and legal issues in Hamburg. But it was also possible in this conflict to find a solution that balanced humanity and the law.

One can see the character of this “humanitarian” solution in the state of Brandenburg. The Left Party is in the state government there with the SPD. Refugees face particularly inhumane living conditions. Improvements that the government has been ordered to undertake have been repeatedly put off.

In addition, the Left Party and SPD opened a new “deportation prison” at Schönefeld airport in Berlin, which is officially not located on German territory. Detainees held there do not have the right to regular asylum proceedings and can be quickly deported back to their home country, even if they have the right to asylum.



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