

German Greens justify police action against refugees

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In an interview with *taz* newspaper last week, Green Party Chair Cem Özdemir justified the massive police operation against refugees in the Berlin district of Kreuzberg as “clearly necessary” and supported the “state monopoly of force.”

Özdemir has lined up behind his party colleague Hans Panhoff, a councillor for the Berlin district of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg. Last month, Panhoff called the police to the Gerhart Hauptmann School to remove more than 200 refugees who had been living in the abandoned school building. The district council, which is dominated by the Greens, had previously excluded a forcible eviction.

While many refugees moved to new accommodations, some 40 to 80 barricaded themselves on the school roof to demand their right to remain indefinitely. Neither the Berlin city government, a coalition of Social Democrats and Christian Democrats, nor the Green Party-dominated district council were prepared to grant them this right.

Berlin-Kreuzberg was under police siege day and night for an entire week, with up to a thousand police officers deployed. No one was allowed in or out of the school.

The police finally withdrew when the refugees were promised they could stay in the building temporarily. However, they were not granted an unlimited right to stay there. The Greens sought to set an example through means of the massive police operation, to show that they are prepared to use the police against defenceless refugees, despite their previous declarations.

In an interview in the Sunday edition of *taz*, the party chair now justifies this course of action. Asked whether such a martial police action was really necessary, Özdemir replied: “Yes, definitely. The police are part

of a democracy. They have to make sure that a legal vacuum doesn’t arise at the school.”

The right to political protest was important, Özdemir continued, but the danger is that “you set a signal that you can achieve more if you occupy roofs and threaten suicide. That cannot be the message. Extortion, the use of force are unacceptable. There is a state monopoly of force that cannot be replaced by people in hoodies.”

The reference to “people in hoodies” was to Berliners who have supported the refugees at the Gerhard-Hauptmann School.

In the *taz* interview, Özdemir makes clear that he is strictly opposed to granting the refugees a right to remain: “It would be unjust and set the wrong signal to treat a group differently now as a result of the current situation.” Although he had “great sympathy for the demand for a right to stay. I will only venture to say that I don’t see Berlin’s Interior Senator (minister) Henkel and the federal interior minister granting it in the foreseeable future.”

As far as the Greens were concerned, there was no alternative, Özdemir stressed: “We are doing everything that we can, but we aren’t alone in the world, and we aren’t alone in Kreuzberg. Even if we had an absolute majority in Kreuzberg, if we were to rule in Berlin and in 2017 in the federal government, I would still say we will not be able to declare paradise on earth.”

He did not mention the Greens’ involvement in creating the nightmarish conditions from which the refugees are fleeing to Europe.

Many of the refugees come from Syria, Libya and other countries in which the US and its European allies have encouraged bloody civil wars. The Greens supported these wars, and vehemently call for foreign interventions by the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces),

stressing that they are on “humanitarian grounds.” But they refuse to provide refuge in Germany for the people who are fleeing from the consequences of these NATO interventions.

Özdemir complains: “If the Greens are in power, there are always expectations that all the world’s problems will be solved. But we have 50 million refugees worldwide. The district of Kreuzberg can’t sort that out on its own”.

Özdemir also tries to play off the refugees and the residents of Kreuzberg against each other. “One has not only a responsibility for the refugees, but also for the residents,” he said. “Some of those in the self-declared solidarity scene completely ignore this.”

This is a sordid and transparent manoeuvre. On the one hand, the bourgeois politicians isolate the refugees through police operations and restrictive conditions such as prohibitions on working and travel, not to speak of the constant tightening of asylum laws, while on the other, they hide behind the supposed intolerance of the people in order to attack the refugees.

In reality, the refugees have received a great deal of support and solidarity from the local residents. Some residents have displayed banners in their windows saying “we support the refugees,” others have provided food and clothing. Thousands of Berliners have demonstrated in support of the demand for their right to remain in Germany.



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