Munich police evict refugees from protest camp

Martin Kreickenbaum
3 December 2014

On November 26 a large contingent of police violently evicted 34 refugees from their protest camp near the Sendling Gate in central Munich. The refugees, who were demonstrating against their inhumane treatment by the authorities, had been on hunger strike since the previous Saturday. Both their protest and the course of action undertaken by the authorities underscore the scandalous treatment meted out to asylum seekers in Germany.

Bolstered by special forces from Support Command, some 500 police officers advanced against the refugees' camp. When ten of the protesters scurried up trees to evade arrest, other camp residents and supporters spontaneously formed chains around their base, but these were savagely broken up by the police. Some refugees persevered in the trees all night in the freezing cold, before being forcibly brought down on ladders provided by the fire brigade.

Previously, neither the Munich city officials nor the Bavarian state government had given any serious attention to the refugees' demands. The spokesman for the group, Adeel A., had therefore announced on Wednesday afternoon that the protesters would henceforth abstain from consumption of liquids and begin a dry hunger strike. "We see no positive signals from the politicians," he commented at a press conference at the camp.

The protest action, organised by the "Refugee Struggle For Freedom" support group, was undertaken to expose the catastrophic living conditions confronting people who manage to find refuge in Germany. In a statement, protesters said they had been deprived of their rights. They demanded a right of stay, official permission to work and study, and the abolition of the particularly inhumane "Lagerpflicht" (camp regulations and duties) operating in the state of Bavaria. "We want to be able to live like human beings in Germany. That is our only demand," added Adeel at the press conference on Wednesday.

However, the relevant authorities turned a deaf ear to their pleas, denying any responsibility for the situation. Munich Mayor Dieter Reiter (Social Democratic Party-SPD), who had visited the camp on Monday, said the city had no jurisdiction in the matter, and merely offered to arrange an "open dialogue" between the refugees and representatives from the state and federal governments.

The state government contended that responsibility rested with the city's District Administrative Council (KVR), since it had authorised the protest. Bavarian Interior Minister Joachim Herrmann (Christian Social Union-CSU) condemned the hunger strike as a "mere spectacle" and declared the protest was illegal. He accused the refugees of "ingratitude". He said he found it "difficult to understand how anyone in such a situation (as theirs) can complain in such a way about (their) conditions in Germany".

Bavarian Social Affairs Minister Emilia Müller (CSU) took the same line, insisting "that a democratic state mustn't allow itself to be blackmailed." Brazenly arrogant, she presumed she had to explain to the refugees what living under German law meant: "We have no totalitarian state here, like the ones you are used to in your own homeland. Consequently, you must learn how to behave here in a state under the rule of law."

Neither Herrmann nor Müller had ever spoken to the refugees before the camp eviction. The camp's spokesman, Adeel A., expressed to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* newspaper his contempt for the Bavarian government. "We demand only what is already in the Basic Law (German constitution). We just want the chance to be part of this society. You can't just shut us up in a holding camp (...) without the right to work. You can't just tell us: Eat and sleep and be quiet. If the minister thinks the situation in the camps is humane, then I'd love to invite her into one and show her how it really is there."

The catastrophic conditions in German refugee camps are well-known. Refugees have been brutally assaulted by camp security staff In North Rhine-Westphalia. At least 50 cases are now officially registered. Refugee shelters throughout Germany are grossly overcrowded, and sometimes asylum seekers have had to sleep in the open air. Conditions of hygiene in the hostels are scandalous; their inner walls are often lined with toxic mould. In the summer, reception

© World Socialist Web Site

centres have had to close because of the spread of infectious diseases.

Following the eviction, Social Affairs Minister Müller maintained her hard line, declaring she had made "no promises" after talking to Mayor Reiter and Adeel A. The camp evictions had nothing to do with protecting refugees "from danger to life and limb", as the state's responsibility is officially prescribed; instead, the police action was undertaken to prevent the seriousness and validity of the refugees' claims from appearing before the eyes of the general public. Over the five days of its existence, the refugee camp received extensive support from local residents, who donated blankets, sweaters and money.

Mayor Reiter, daring to claim he was speaking on behalf of "the (already evicted) refugees", shamelessly pretended that they had "achieved their goal and initiated a political discussion". In fact, precisely the opposite is the case.

Interior Minister Herrmann firmly declared that the refugees' demands were "incapable of being met". Bayern would adhere to the " *Lagerpflicht* " regulations. This term for the permanent accommodation of refugees in so-called communal housing is now virtually part of official bureaucratic language—as though concentration camps had never existed in Bavaria and Germany.

The *Lagerpflicht* stipulations for lodgings far away from cities are designed to isolate refugees and cut them off from access to education and employment. The endless overcrowding, noise and disgustingly unhygienic conditions cause illness and depression, and are intended to torment and psychologically wear down the asylum seekers.

Following the violent eviction of a similar camp at the Munich cattle market, where refugees had also resorted to a "dry" hunger strike, municipal and state government authorities remained undeterred. Instead of receiving a right to remain in Germany, quite a few of these people soon found their asylum applications had been rejected. Furthermore, after the eviction of asylum seekers from an occupied school in Berlin, promises made by the local Green district mayor were not kept, and refugees were ruthlessly deported.

The established parties conduct the "discussion" of the right to asylum in only one way—in order to toughen it. A few weeks ago, Baden-Württemberg Prime Minister Winfried Kretschmann (Green Party) not only agreed to the extension of the concept of safe countries of origin; he also endorsed stringent conditions of residence and the continuation of a *de facto* ban on employment for asylum seekers. The Greens made this part of official party policy at their party conference in Hamburg last month.

This week, the federal cabinet plans to pass a bill, sharply tightening residency rights in the country. New entry and residence restrictions are to be created, whereby the principle of the *Kettenduldung* (the practice of extending "tolerated" residence over successive periods) will be made to cover more people than hitherto. Since residence "tolerance" is merely a recognition of persisting legal restrictions on deportation (although it also constitutes an official ban on residence and thus criminalizes refugees), the toleration status is contingent upon strict employment and job training prohibitions.

In addition, the so-called Dublin Regulations will be exploited to provide new grounds for incarcerating refugees in deportation centres, i.e., for refugees prior to their deportation to the European Union member state they allegedly first entered. Finally, a re-entry prohibition for rejected asylum seekers is also provided in the proposed legislation.

Interior Minister Markus Ulbig (Christian Democratic Union-CDU) has announced the establishment of a special police task force to deal with delinquent asylum seekers in the federal state of Saxony. "If asylum seekers commit serious offences, stringent measures must be consistently pursued in future," Ulbig told *Spiegel Online*. He also expressly defended xenophobic demonstrations against the 11,000 refugees who settled in Saxony this year, saying: "I don't think you can be completely against demonstrators who are only expressing their opinion about this situation."

The inhumane immigration policy is being promoted not only via the support given to xenophobic protests. Politicians and the media regularly pour out statistics and deliberately interpret them falsely. This year, about 135,000 refugees had made an initial request for asylum in Germany by the end of October—instead of the continually bandied "more than 200,000".

Given the more than 50 million refugees worldwide, talk of a stream of refugees flooding into the country is patently absurd. It is rather the case that a mere trickle reaches Germany. And even these few are to be deterred by the continual sharpening of asylum law.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site