

# Xenophobic campaign in Germany leads to burning of refugee homes

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Three houses meant to provide accommodation for refugees were set on fire in Vorra, Bavaria last Friday night. This crime is the product of a xenophobic campaign by politicians and the media.

The arson was clearly politically motivated. In the immediate vicinity, the words "No asylum seekers in Vorra" were sprayed on a house wall, along with two swastikas. The fire engulfed an empty restaurant, a barn and a house, which had all been converted into refugee accommodations. The buildings were almost ready.

The night before, there had already been a fire at a refugees' protest camp on Weißekreuz Square in Hanover, injuring two people. It is still unclear whether this was the result of an attack or an accident, but the refugees suspect that this may have been an attempt to sabotage their demonstration.

According to the human rights organization ProAsyl, a total of 23 arson attacks on refugee shelters were committed in the first three quarters of 2014. In addition, there were 29 racist attacks on refugees.

The violence against refugees is not an expression of a generalised xenophobia as is often claimed by politicians and press commentators. A large proportion of the 2,000-strong population of Vorra gathered on Sunday to form a human chain around the planned refugee homes to express their solidarity with the asylum seekers.

"We and other neighbours were looking forward to the arrival of the asylum seekers," one inhabitant of Vorra told broadcaster *Bayerischer Rundfunk*. In recent weeks, a group of supporters for the migrants was founded in the village. The residents were glad that the buildings which had stood empty for years had been finally restored and prepared for refugees, one local person said.

The xenophobic attacks are the product of a

systematic campaign by politicians and the media. Right-wing gangs are being encouraged by the reactionary immigration policies of the government and the right-wing positions of leading politicians.

The day after the arson attack in Vorra, the Bavarian based Christian Social Union (CSU) met just a few dozen kilometers away in Nuremberg for its state convention. Topics at the CSU meeting included the need to stop immigrants coming to Germany, and for those already in the country to speak German at home. This proposal formed part of the original lead motion to the CSU convention.

The day before the attack, the Bavarian state interior minister, Joachim Herrmann (CSU), told broadcaster *ZDF*: "We cannot solve Africa's problems by allowing half the people of Africa to come to Europe."

In the tabloid *Bild* newspaper, Herrmann also backed the xenophobic demonstrations which are currently taking place under the name of "Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the West" (Pegida) in Dresden. One must "acknowledge the fears of the population before right-wing rat-catchers do so with their blunt slogans", said the minister.

German federal interior minister Thomas de Maizière (CDU, Christian Democratic Union) was even clearer. As early as last Thursday, he defended the anti-immigrant demonstrations when speaking to broadcaster *ARD*. Interviewed on the main news programme "Tagesthemen", he admitted there were some "problematic developments" with the initiators of the demonstrations; "But among those who are participating, there are quite a few expressing their concerns regarding the challenges of our time."

Then De Maizière claimed that a section of German citizens felt like foreigners in their own country, and said "We have to take these concerns seriously, we

have to deal with them."

The Saxony state interior minister Markus Ulbig (CDU) also wants to develop a dialogue with the neo-Nazis of Pediga. He declared that it was "completely wrong to stigmatize them and paint them all as right-wingers."

In November, Ulbig announced the setting up of a special police unit, which would focus solely on alleged delinquent asylum seekers. Even according to the figures of his ministry, this amounts to a maximum of just 160 to 170 people.

Ulbig combined his plan with right-wing populist nostrums. "And that means for me quite clearly that those coming to us who do not abide by the rules must correspondingly suffer the consequences. Against this background, it is natural and necessary that we have a functioning organizational [police] unit," he told the broadcaster *Deutschlandfunk*.

The campaign against refugees is by no means limited to the right-wing fringes of the CDU. Last September, when the federal government massively attacked the right of asylum, it was able to rely upon the vote of the Green Party-SPD ruled state of Baden-Württemberg. The Green Party state premier Winfried Kretschmann then received support for his stance on behalf of the government from the state and federal conventions of his party.

The same month, there were serious and repeated cases of the mistreatment of refugees in North Rhine Westphalia. This state is ruled by an SPD-Green Party coalition that was supported by the Left Party until 2012.

The xenophobic and right-wing populist politics of the federal government are closely linked to the remilitarization of Germany and the social attacks which are being imposed across Europe. The dregs of society are being mobilized to suppress popular resistance against these policies.

The result is the racist and xenophobic attacks, and far right demonstrations, which are used by the political elite to further deter refugees and attack the democratic rights of the entire population.



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