

German politicians agitate against immigrants

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Recent days have seen a series of arson attacks on accommodation centres for refugees in Germany. Only luck has prevented any loss of life. In most cases, the perpetrators are yet to be captured, but the ideological agitators are well known. They sit in government ministries at the federal and state level.

As was the case in 1992, when a mob set fire to a home for Vietnamese migrant workers in Rostock and a wave of attacks swept the country, culminating in several deaths in Solingen and Mölln, leading politicians are inciting anti-immigrant forces with agitation against refugees.

On Friday night, a proposed home for refugees was set on fire in Remchingen, Bad-Württemberg. The building, which was intended to house asylum seekers from the beginning of next year, was severely damaged and will likely have to be torn down.

Almost at the same time, a wastepaper bin in the garage of a refugee centre in Waldaschaff, Bavaria was set alight. Only thanks to the rapid discovery of the fire was it possible to prevent it spreading to the building, where 30 refugees were staying.

On the night of July 15, a former guest house in Reichertshofen, Bavaria, which was being renovated to house 67 asylum seekers from the beginning of September, was burnt down.

Other arson attacks have taken place in recent weeks in Preetz and Heppberg in Bavaria, Hoyerswerda and Meißen in Saxony, Lübeck in Schleswig-Holstein, Zossen in Brandenburg, Limburgerhof in Rheinland Palatinate, and Tröglitz in Saxony-Anhalt.

A refugee centre in Leipzig was shot at several times this month with live ammunition. In Kreis Limburg, Hesse, a proposed home for asylum seekers was defaced with filth. And in February, at a home in Freital, Saxony, a bomb attack was carried out resulting in severe injuries to seven people. The local police at first sought to dismiss the incident as a fireworks explosion, mentioning only

one injury.

The Antonio Amadeu Foundation has identified 104 racially motivated attacks on refugee homes this year, including 15 arson attacks. Refugees were attacked in 29 other incidents, resulting in injuries to 49 people. In 2014, the police recorded 150 attacks, with 67 in the months from October to December alone. This was more than occurred for all of 2013, and three times as many as in 2012.

The violence against refugee and asylum-seeker accommodation centres is not the result of widespread and growing anti-immigrant sentiment, as commentators and politicians often claim. In Remchingen, residents spontaneously organised a solidarity rally for the refugees after the arson attack. Even the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* was compelled to admit that the level of social support for providing homes to refugees was much greater than the size of the small, locally-based, right-wing extremist scene.

In many small localities where accommodation centres for refugees are being established, the number of people welcoming the refugees and offering practical support is generally much higher than the number of people taking part in racist protests.

However, the small minority of right-wing extremists are supported and encouraged by propaganda from leading politicians.

German Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière said in an interview with the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* at the weekend that it was “absolutely understandable” that people “ask critical questions” when refugees come from Kosovo, Serbia or Albania. That 40 percent of asylum seekers came from these Balkan states was “a disgrace for Europe and unacceptable,” he said.

For de Maizière, the “disgrace” is not that people, above all Roma, are forced to flee from discrimination, persecution and poverty in these countries. Rather, it is

the fact that the European Union is incapable of stopping them from coming to Germany. “The most important thing is to reduce their numbers drastically,” the interior minister declared.

He called for further restrictions on refugees and demanded that benefits, such as the so-called “pocket money” allotment of €143 per month for asylum seekers from western Balkan states, be cut. In making this demand, he was echoing statements from the head of the federal office for migrants and refugees, Manfred Schmidt. To do so would leave newly arriving refugees with no means of survival, in violation of European asylum regulations.

Bavarian state premier Horst Seehofer went even further. At a regional Christian Social Union (CSU) party conference in lower Bavaria, he declared that the influx of refugees from the Balkans involved “abuse on a mass scale.” Such an “abuse of asylum” reduces popular acceptance of refugees, he said, adding, “We must adopt rigorous measures.” To this end, the Bavarian state government intends to drastically reduce the already miserable standards of care and accommodation for refugees.

On Monday, the Bavarian cabinet decided at a meeting in St. Quirin to build two special reception centres for refugees near the borders with Austria and the Czech Republic. Seehofer explicitly refused to exclude the setting up of rudimentary tent camps, each housing 1,000 people, where asylum applications would be processed within two weeks and refugees systematically deported.

On the sidelines of the meeting, CSU General Secretary Andreas Scheuer stepped up the anti-immigrant agitation. He told the *Passauer Neue Presse*, “The pressure from an influx of immigrants not returning home is overwhelming and barely manageable. Sixty million refugees are waiting at the borders. What should we do with this massive army? We can’t save the whole world.”

With such agitation and the virtual criminalisation of refugees, the CSU is lighting the fuse for the next attacks on asylum seeker centres.

In the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, journalist Heribert Prantl compared Seehofer’s plans to the refugee policy of Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orban. In Hungary, a 175-kilometre-long barrier is being built on the border with Serbia to prevent refugees from entering the country. They are also being bullied, criminalised and detained. Like Seehofer in Bavaria, Orban wants to ban refugees from cities so that “the local population will not be disturbed by the masses of refugees,” as Janos Lazar,

chief of staff to Orban, recently stated.

Although Hungary’s refugee policy is in violation of the Geneva Convention on refugees and existing European Union law, it is increasingly becoming a model for the demagogues in the German government.

Interior Minister de Maizière is also clearly attracted by the inhumane stance of the Hungarian government. In his interview with the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, he said, “Hungary is a country with an external border in the Schengen Zone, and we demand that these states secure the external borders. Hungary is under extreme pressure. Tens of thousands of asylum seekers have been accepted and registered there over recent months.”

The campaign of agitation against refugees is by no means restricted to the right wing of the Bavarian-based CSU and its sister party, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU). The Green state premier in Bade-Württemberg, Winfried Kretschmann, also called at the weekend for more restrictions and decisive action to deport refugees. Last September, when the German government significantly restricted the right to asylum, it won the support in the Bundesrat, Germany’s upper house of parliament, of the Social Democratic-Green government in Bade-Württemberg.

The Social Democrats (SPD) and Left Party also back the attacks on the basic rights of refugees. At the beginning of the year, SPD Chairman Sigmar Gabriel and Left Party parliamentary fraction leader Gregor Gysi declared that the racist activities of the far-right Pegida movement had to be seen as an expression of fears and concerns among wide layers of the population, who feel overwhelmed.

The present conditions recall the fatal years of 1992-3. At the time, hundreds of thousands fled to Germany to escape the civil war in Yugoslavia. When racist and neo-Nazi groups began hunting down refugees, Germany’s parliamentary parties virtually abolished the right to asylum. Confronted with a new wave of refugees, the ruling elite is turning to the same criminal measures to wipe out what remains of the right to asylum.



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