

Calls for deployment of German army to deal with refugees

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Refugees in Germany face miserable living conditions, with many forced to reside in hastily and poorly built tent camps. In Bavaria, the first emergency camps for Balkan refugees have opened, and calls are growing for the deployment of the German army. The emergency situation created by the authorities is aimed at deterring refugees from seeking protection in Germany and preparing the way for a dramatic restriction of the right to asylum.

Although the increase in refugees has been predicted for several months, neither the federal government nor any state government made any serious preparations for the immigrants' accommodation. Factories, schools and empty army barracks are being hurriedly turned into reception centres. There are neither sufficient sanitary facilities nor the possibility for private areas of any kind for the frequently traumatised refugees at these locations.

Terrible conditions exist in the temporary tent camps established in Hamburg, Eisenhüttenstadt (Brandenburg), Neuenstadt (Baden-Württemberg) and numerous other places. Up to 1,300 refugees have been crammed in together at these locations.

Conditions are particularly disastrous in the refugee camp in Dresden. When the first refugees were due to move into the camp established by the German Red Cross 10 days ago, a right-wing mob gathered in front of the camp and began attacking volunteers with bottles and stones. Police did nothing to protect the refugees or their helpers.

A few days later, the refugees protested the catastrophic conditions with a blockade. The tents at the Dresden site are jammed together side by side, sanitary facilities are totally inadequate and medical care and rubbish disposal facilities are virtually non-existent. It only took a few days for the first illnesses caused by the miserable conditions to make their appearance.

Authorities in Berlin have gone a step further and are

leaving refugees homeless. According to the Berlin Council for Refugees, the state department for health care and social welfare is only giving out hostel vouchers to refugees, although just a third of the refugees find accommodation in hostels. Most hostels are filled with tourists or refuse to accept refugees, because the city of Berlin has failed to pay outstanding bills.

Refugees are compelled to sleep in parks or at the main train station in the open air. In violation of the law, they are given only €6 [\$US6.56] per day, half the standard social security rate, to support themselves. If refugees then try to take action to help themselves, they are bullied. According to the Berlin state senate, begging in subways, on streets and in squares is “out of control”, resulting in its plan to ban begging by children.

In Ingolstadt, Bavaria, the Max Immelmann barracks are being refurbished to serve as a refugee camp for migrants from the Balkans. Up to 1,500 refugees will be accommodated there. Under the Bavarian government's plan, a sped-up asylum procedure will see the applications processed within four weeks and the rejected refugees immediately deported. The Bavarian Refugee Council strongly criticised the planned reception centre and correctly described it as an “emergency camp with its own deportation airport”.

At the same time, calls are growing for the deployment of the army to intervene. German law excludes such a deployment in principle, because in the 20th century the *Reichswehr*—the army under the Weimar Republic—and the *Wehrmacht*—the armed forces under the Nazis—were used to brutalize the population. But this ban has been repeatedly watered down in recent years.

The German army was not only called on to assist during such natural disasters as the Elbe River flooding in 2002, but also at the G8 conference in Heiligendamm in 2007, when fighter jets and tanks were deployed to intimidate and suppress protests.

Now, the chairman of the committee on internal affairs in Saxony's state parliament, Mario Pecher (Social Democratic Party, SPD), has called for the army to operate refugee reception centres. Saxony's state premier Holger Stahlknecht (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) went even further, describing the number of refugees in Germany as an "international crisis resulting in conditions resembling the migration of entire peoples". On this reactionary, hysterical basis, Stahlknecht raised the demand for "the current restriction of the German army to foreign deployments and disaster response" to be reconsidered.

Soldiers guarding camps of refugees from the Balkans recalls the Nazi concentration camps. In 1935, the Hitler government declared that Sinti and Roma were enemies of the Reich. More than 25,000 were registered in the German Reich and deported. In total, 500,000 fell victim to the Nazi butchery throughout Europe.

Today, relatives of the Roma make up the majority of the refugees from the Balkans. According to figures from the German government, 90 percent of asylum seekers from Serbia are Roma, 72 percent from Macedonia, 60 percent from Bosnia and 42 percent from Montenegro.

These refugees, in particular, are the target of scurrilous propaganda from the German media and politicians. Bavarian state premier Horst Seehofer (Christian Social Union, CSU) has denounced them as "mass abusers of asylum", while Hamburg Mayor Olaf Scholz (SPD) sounded a similar note by contemptuously saying that the immigrants were "refugees without any perspective of staying".

Scholz also appealed for special reception centres to "arrive at quicker, non-bureaucratic decisions". This means nothing less than the illegal curtailing of the asylum process and the swift deportation of refugees. Markus Ulbig (CDU) has also demanded the legal restriction of the right to asylum. He has begun reviewing "whether there is the possibility of curtailing the rights of obviously groundless asylum applications by reforming the basic law".

Baden-Württemberg's state premier Winfried Kretschmann (Greens) also called for additional anti-immigrant measures, including the cutting of the pocket money of €143 per month and the more decisive deportation of refugees. He also supports demands from SPD and CDU figures to declare Serbia, Kosovo, Albania and Montenegro "secure" countries of origin, so asylum applications can be more quickly rejected and refugees more swiftly deported.

Roma in the Balkans, who already suffer from high unemployment and lack of prospects, are often discriminated against. They have virtually no chance of getting work, housing or education. Their settlements are regularly cleared by bulldozers and residents left homeless. Where settlements are tolerated, they are often located on or near rubbish dumps without electricity or water supply.

The German government is, in large part, responsible for the disastrous conditions in which the Roma live. In the early 1990s, Germany played a key role in the break-up of the former Yugoslavia and the subsequent brutal civil war. In 1999, it actively intervened to devastate the Balkans with its participation in the war against Serbia. At that time, an estimated 100,000 Roma were forced to flee their homes and many remain homeless and stateless to this day.

Last year, a journalist described the situation of the Roma in Serbia for the Federal Agency for Civic Education: "They live in slums, which do not exist, in streets, which do not exist, in huts that have no numbers outside. Their children do not effectively exist because they were born in a place that does not exist, and this place does not exist, because it is not listed in any land registry office and officially does not exist."

ProAsyl cites a legal opinion arguing that the inhumane conditions under which the Roma live in the Balkans, constitutes a "cumulative persecution" within the meaning of the right to asylum, which means that the Roma should be granted protection status.

Instead, the Roma in Germany are denounced as "social state spongers", incarcerated in special camps, which are then guarded by German soldiers. This can only be described as cynical, racist policies. The official stigmatization of Roma as "social parasites" creates the climate for incitement and racist attacks against refugee facilities.



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