

Attacks on refugee camp encouraged by German government's right-wing policies

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Right-wing extremists attacked refugee accommodations over the weekend in the small town of Heidenau near Dresden. Over three successive nights they repeatedly attacked police and left-wing counter-demonstrators with fireworks and stones, all while chanting Nazi slogans.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel (Christian Democrats, CDU) Vice Chancellor Sigmar Gabriel (Social Democrats, SPD) and other politicians released official statements in which they condemned the violence against refugees. But the crocodile tears being shed cannot disguise the fact that the state apparatus and the German government's right-wing policies contributed considerably to the violence.

The attacks came as no surprise; the fascist National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) registered a demonstration to pass through Heidenau on Friday. On social media and in forums, right-wing extremists urged "blockades" and "civil war" to stop the plan to open the housing for refugees over the weekend.

Despite this, only 135 police officers were present. Encouraged by this balance of forces, between 600 and 1,000 right-wing extremist demonstrators entered the empty warehouse, which was due to begin accommodating asylum seekers on Saturday. They attacked police with stones and fireworks, injuring 31 officers. Nazi and anti-immigrant slogans were repeatedly chanted, such as "We are the people," "Foreigners Out!" and "national resistance." "Sieg Heil!" calls were also heard.

Even after this experience, the contingent of police was strengthened by 40 to 175 officers for the opening of the accommodation on Saturday. In addition, 150 people gathered in front of the building to demonstrate their solidarity with the refugees.

After right-wing extremists once again gathered at the

warehouse on Saturday evening, throwing stones and fireworks, the police called on the supporters of the refugees to end their demonstration on the grounds that their security could not be guaranteed. In subsequent clashes, more police were injured. The first refugees were brought into the accommodation under police escort.

On Sunday, a large contingent of officers was deployed, two water cannons were set up and a so-called control zone was established in a 500-metre radius around the camp, within which police could search individuals merely on suspicion, issue expulsions, and ban people from the area.

But the state power was ultimately deployed more against counter-demonstrators who had travelled to the town from Leipzig and Dresden, rather than the right-wing vandals. As the protesters clashed with right-wing extremists at a petrol station, the police deployed tear gas and rubber bullets, and according to eyewitnesses forced the left-wing demonstrators to the train station and onto trains. There were no further attacks on the refugee centre on Sunday.

Confronted with this chronology of events, the question is posed: to what extent were the attacks encouraged by the Saxony state government, or at least tolerated by it? Shaghayegh, a 30-year-old activist from the Asylum Seekers Movement who was in the area on Friday and Saturday, said in an interview with the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* that even the choice of accommodation had been dubious.

"The question we are asking ourselves is why accommodate refugees in a town like this," Shaghayegh said. Heidenau has a strong right-wing scene. At the most recent town council elections, the NPD secured 7.5 percent of the vote. In addition, the warehouse, left unoccupied for two years, is not a fit

place for people to live in. A total of 600 refugees are to be housed in one large room.

Similar scenes played out 15 kilometres away in the state capital, Dresden. According to doctors, at a tent camp for 800 refugees that was established earlier this year, human rights were trampled underfoot. There were insufficient sanitary facilities and inadequate medical care.

The NPD organised demonstrations in July against the refugees in Dresden. Left-wing counter-demonstrators were attacked by right-wing extremists, and several counter-demonstrators were seriously injured.

These are not isolated cases. According to official government figures, there were 200 attacks on refugee centres during the first six months of the year. Remarkably, 42 of them took place in Saxony. However, the state takes in only around 5 percent of all refugees.

The reason for this is that the connections between the government and the right-wing extremist milieu are particularly close in Saxony. The judiciary, police and domestic intelligence agency have been targeting Nazi elements for years, while the right-wing extremists continue with their activities unhindered.

Last year, the right-wing Pegida movement was systematically built up. The anti-Islamic group, which had its centre in Dresden, immediately won the support of the state office for political education. Along with SPD leader Sigmar Gabriel, several members of the state government spoke out in favour of a “dialogue” with the right-wing radicals.

In addition, the government of Saxony has adopted the programme of the far right in recent years. Two weeks ago, Saxony CDU General Secretary Michael Kretschmer welcomed the Hungarian plan to build a 175-kilometre long fence along its border with Serbia.

The state spokesman for interior affairs in the CDU, Christian Hartmann, even called for the reintroduction of border controls within the European Union. Last year, Saxony’s interior minister Markus Ulbig urged the creation of a special police unit to target asylum seekers committing criminal offences.

The ability of the neo-Nazi mob to run riot again in Germany is the direct product of these right-wing politics, not only at state level but also throughout the country. Right-wing extremist forces have been

encouraged by a refugee policy that is openly based on deterrence.

The unrest involving ultra right-wing elements has in turn been exploited by politicians and the media to justify renewed attacks on refugees. Even as the violence in Heidenau continued, Peter Karstens published a comment in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung* headlined “The downside of the open culture.” In it he criticised the fact that, “in a climate of misunderstood tolerance and laziness,” politicians for years had avoided “deporting rejected asylum seekers.”

Then he cited the interior spokesman for the CDU/Christian Social Union parliamentary faction, Stefan Mayer, who said, “The inadequate level of deportations of rejected asylum seekers is one of the main problems in overcoming the tense asylum seeker situation.”

The foul propaganda against refugees and immigrants can only be understood in a broader political context. A policy is being carried out against refugees, in collaboration with right-wing forces, which is in reality aimed against all workers. The basic social and democratic rights denied to refugees today will be called into question in general tomorrow. A policy like that being imposed by the German government in Greece, and the preparation of new wars, are not compatible with democratic rights for the working class.

It is thus all the more cynical when representatives of all the establishment political parties respond to attacks on refugees by calling for the further strengthening of the state apparatus, which is itself responsible for organising the misery faced by refugees.

Saxony’s representative for external affairs, Geert Mackenroth (CDU), has already announced the deployment of “professional security services”, as well as video surveillance and bans on demonstrations. Such security services have been in the headlines many times over the past year for torturing and severely abusing refugees.



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