

German interior minister plans further attacks on refugees

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After a number of fires at refugee camps over recent weeks, and the intimidation of asylum seekers by neo-Nazis, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and President Joachim Gauck belatedly issued an official statement last Wednesday.

Merkel visited the refugee camp in Heidenau, Saxony, where right-wing extremists ran riot over recent days, and declared her commitment to the humane treatment of refugees. Gauck also made an appearance in front of a refugee camp in Berlin and praised volunteers who were carrying out official tasks in their free time.

But these official media appearances as well as the condemnation of anti-immigrant chauvinism by the Social Democrat (SPD) leader Sigmar Gabriel—who described the neo-Nazi rioters as a “mob”—are aimed above all at diverting attention away from the government’s responsibility for the miserable conditions confronting refugees.

Not only does the German government bear joint responsibility for the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Libya, and the intolerable conditions in many regions from which millions are fleeing for their lives, but they are also consciously promoting anti-immigrant sentiments and placing as many hurdles as possible in the way of refugees.

Just a day before Merkel and Gauck publicly shed crocodile tears over the refugees, interior minister Thomas de Maizière sent a catalogue of wide-ranging legislative reforms to reduce levels of immigration to the other ministries for approval.

On Sunday both Merkel and de Maizière both stressed that deportation procedures against so-called “economic refugees,” i.e. those forced to flee their countries due to extreme poverty and destitution, would be intensified.

Refugees from so-called secure states of origin, including Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro, will practically be imprisoned and immediately be deported. They will have to stay in refugee camps twice as long, i.e. six instead of three months and accept residency legislation, which means they can be deported at any time. Welfare for refugees is to be cut drastically, with what remains being provided mainly in the form of material aid rather than cash.

“In the view of the interior minister, accelerated legal proceedings for people who have little hope of asylum in Germany should send a signal to their countries—and thus restrict the flow [of refugees],” commented *Spiegel Online*, which had early access to the text of the proposals.

In another remarkable response to the developing crisis, the chairman of the Social Democrats (SPD) in Thuringia, Andreas Bausewein, went public with a major attack on the refugees. In an “open letter” to German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Thuringia’s state premier Bodo Ramelow (Left Party), he demanded that the children of refugees be removed from the schools.

Bausewein demanded that children of refugees not be sent to school until their residency status, and that of their family, had been decided. In his own words, he called for a “suspension of the requirement to attend school until the determination of the residency status of the children/family, and no requirement to attend school during ongoing application, at least for asylum seekers from secure countries of origin.”

The number of children attending school without residency status was very high, the SPD politician complained. All children between six and sixteen years of age are sent to school after three months in Germany, but “the capacity of the schools has been

overstretched.”

Bausewein’s demand undoubtedly violates the law. The obligation to attend school goes back to the Reformation and Martin Luther (1483-1546) and has been law in many parts of Germany for centuries.

Bausewein’s choice of an “open letter,” which he signed in his capacity as mayor of Erfurt, is, to put it mildly, remarkable. The SPD forms the government in Thuringia with the Left Party, so Bausewein could have spoken directly with Ramelow at any time. However, he is obviously concerned with the promotion of anti-immigrant sentiment and the encouragement of right-wing prejudices.

Bausewein also used his open letter to call for better surveillance of the refugees by expanding the financial resources for state security services. He wrote that the “recognition of the scale of surveillance deemed necessary by municipalities and the covering in full of the costs arising from this” was necessary.

In addition, Bausewein, like de Maizière, aims to arbitrarily strengthen asylum laws and make the laws, which are already extremely restrictive, as strict as possible. He demanded, “The existing list of secure countries of origin must be urgently reviewed and adjusted to the current situation...the departure of asylum seekers who have not been recognised as refugees, whose asylum applications have been rejected and who have no right to appeal, should proceed quickly and, if necessary, be enforced by deportations.”

Such language is hardly distinguishable from the crude “foreigners out!” cries of the radical right-wing agitators. Bausewein cynically adds that the reason for his initiative was that he “does not want to see another ‘Heidenau’—whether in Erfurt or any other city.” But in his letter, he is promoting precisely the sentiments that will encourage further racist attacks.

Bausewein is a leading Social Democrat. The 42-year-old mayor of Erfurt, who is an electrician by training with a diploma in social pedagogy, has been described as the “rising star of the SPD” (*taz*) or a “dyed-in-the-wool SPD” politician (MDR). He was formerly state leader of the young Social Democrats (Jusos) and an employee of the German confederation of trade unions (DGB). Since October 2014, he has served as state chairman of the SPD in Thuringia.

His latest intervention underscores once again the source of anti-immigrant acts: the establishment

politicians who promote and facilitate them. They greet exhausted refugees upon arrival with bullying, repressive measures and intimidation, providing encouragement to the neo-Nazis. They attempt to divide the population and smother widespread sympathy for the refugees.

The measures being deployed against refugees today will confront the entire working class tomorrow: unprecedented attacks on basic democratic rights, such as the right to education. In Greece, democratic rights have already been trampled underfoot by the German government.

At the same time, under the pretext of combatting the causes for the growing number of refugees, the German government is preparing new imperialist wars and military interventions in the Middle East and Africa.

The policies of preparing for war and attacking basic social and democratic rights are supported by all political parties, from the Alternative for Germany (AFD) to the Left Party. The example of Thuringia, where a coalition of the Left Party, SPD and Greens has been in government for a year under Ramelow, makes this absolutely clear.

Ramelow stated in an interview with the *Rheinische Post* a few weeks ago that his party supported the return of German militarism. Under the headline “Pacifism is worthless for Germany,” the newspaper cited Ramelow, who commented that he had “respect for anyone who says they are a pacifist. But I don’t see that as a concept for action for a nation like Germany.”

The Left Party and the SPD in Thuringia have an excellent understanding with each other. As Bausewein told the *taz* a year ago, “The relationship of the SPD to the Left Party has become less restrained...in the municipalities the SPD and Left Party work just as well together.” He explained that in social policy and municipal budgets, the SPD could reach agreement with the Left Party quicker than with the Christian Democrats.



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