German Left Party leader proposes separating refugees according to ethnicity

Our correspondent
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On August 19, fighting took place amongst refugees at a reception centre in the German town of Suhl in the state of Thuringia. The conflict was ended after a massive police intervention that left several persons injured. The spark for the dispute is alleged to have been a torn copy of the Koran, but the real causes undoubtedly are to be found in the catastrophic conditions prevailing in the refugee camp.

The centre consists of apartment blocks, formerly allocated to the now-defunct East German National People's Army, which are designed to house 1,200 persons. Now, they are hopelessly overcrowded. Up to 1,800 refugees have been billeted in the run-down blocks, with some forced to sleep in corridors.

The buildings are in such a dilapidated state that the mayor of Suhl, Jens Triebel, threatened to close the blocks because of structural deficiencies.

"Black mold covers the sanitary areas almost down to the ground. Room doors are missing. There is no privacy. Up to seven beds are stacked together inside 12 square metres...they wait in a queue for two hours to eat", reported the *Thüringer Allgemeine*. The closure of the centre was only prevented after a handful of the worst deficiencies were remedied.

It was not the first incident of its kind in the refugee camp. Approximately 80 persons were involved in disputes at the beginning of August as a result of the inhuman conditions imposed upon often severely traumatised people who have fled war zones in the most difficult circumstances, at risk of their lives, and who are now crammed into tiny, unsanitary spaces.

Following the most recent incident ,the premier of Thuringia, Bodo Ramelow (Left Party), spoke out and proposed that refugees should be isolated along ethnic lines in order to prevent such conflicts in future.

Ramelow is well aware that the real cause for tensions is the inhumane practise of forcing refugees into overcrowded, dilapidated accommodation. In this respect, the main responsibility rests with the Left Party, which heads a coalition in the state with the Social Democratic Party and Greens.

By declaring that conflicts are the result of ethnic differences, Ramelow diverts attention not only from the intolerable conditions in the Thuringian refugee camps, but also encourages xenophobia.

"Those who think they have to use force, cannot live amongst us" and "those who do not want to be integrated have no claim to our hospitality," Ramelow declared in an interview a few days later.

Such formulations, which are often proposed by right-wing populists or found on the election posters of the neo-fascist NPD, are now common within the entire bourgeois spectrum stretching from the conservative CDU/CSU to the Left Party, fueling xenophobia and racism and encouraging small right-wing mobs to attack refugee shelters, as was the case recently in Heidenau in the state of Saxony.

Last Tuesday, the Thuringian state government led by Ramelow and the Left Party unanimously decided to erect a fence around the refugee shelter in Suhl as soon as possible. According to the Thuringian minister for migration, Dieter Lauinger (Alliance '90 / The Greens) the aim of the fence was "to better control outbreaks of violence between residents such as that of last week".

At the same time, the Thuringian State Administration Office rejected the offer of two large buildings to house refugees and relieve the existing overcrowded accommodation. According to a spokesman: "We do not want to exacerbate the situation in Suhl."

Instead of undertaking serious measures to improve the intolerable situation of the refugees and thus

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prevent further tensions and conflicts, the situation is being further exacerbated by populist slogans and the incitement of right-wing mobs.

It is significant that this is taking place under a coalition administration led by the Left Party. This illustrates quite starkly that the Left Party is no different from all other bourgeois parties in regard to the treatment of refugees.

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