

Desperate refugees storm registration office in Berlin

Stefan Steinberg
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On Monday afternoon, several hundred refugees broke through police barricades and tried to enter the main office for asylum registrations in Berlin.

The attempt to enter the building, the State Office for Public Health and Social Affairs (LaGeSo), was a desperate protest on the part of refugees frustrated with their treatment at the hands of the official bureaucracies in Germany.

The protest ended after half a dozen wagonloads of police intervened to repulse the refugees.

Every day, hundreds of refugees stream through the gates and assemble on the premises of the LaGeSo to await registration in Berlin. The refugees receive a number and are then expected to attend every day until their number appears on a screen outside the asylum offices. This reporter spoke to some refugees who had waited over 30 days for their number to appear on the screen.

Many are forced to sleep in squalor overnight on the pavement in front of the building because they have nowhere else to go.

Hygienic conditions on the premises of the LaGeSo premises are completely inadequate. A handful of toilets are available for the hundreds who wait for hours to register. Entire families with all their belongings are crammed on the few benches outside the offices. Everybody else is expected to stand in line for hours at a time.

In front of the building, police and security guards control the entrance to prevent any renewed disturbances.

The WSWs spoke with George, who had fled Syria to come to Berlin. He was sitting on one of the barriers barring the refugees entrance to the offices. He said that he had been waiting a total of 33 days to register. During the days of waiting he was using a small

notebook to teach himself German.

“I fled Syria to escape the fighting. Everybody wants to leave. I am a Christian, and we were caught between the Assad regime on one side and the Islamist extremists on the other. In Damascus I was once a wealthy man. I owned a hotel and some markets. All of them were bombed, and now I have nothing. Here in Berlin I am a beggar. In the course of the fighting I also lost my brother and a sister.

“My journey here to Berlin was illegal. It was illegal because the German authorities in one country after another refused to give me a visa. I went to the German embassies in both Lebanon and Turkey and they both turned me down.

“In the end I left my family in Lebanon and had to pay traffickers 12,000 euros to get to Europe. These people are criminals, and I risked my life nearly everyday. The journey to Berlin took nearly eight months and for large parts of the way through Eastern Europe I had to walk. Now I am here, the authorities force me to wait over a month to register my claim to asylum. It is no way to treat a fellow human being.”

Stefan also waited outside the LaGeSo building with Ali and his son. Stefan met Ali at an airport and spontaneously decided to provide the refugee from Syria and his seven-year-old son a roof over their heads. He was at the building on Monday when refugees tried to storm it: “They did not want to do any harm. It was merely an attempt to express their frustration with the system here. Ali has been waiting here now for ten days to be allowed in. I do not understand the logic of the system and there is no attempt to really explain it.

“Ali and his family fled Damascus because of the war and tried to enter Europe via the Mediterranean. In October 2013 the boat they were on sunk, and Ali’s

wife and their twin son were both drowned. A total of 450 refugees were crammed on the boat.”

Stefan acknowledged that the foreign policies of western nations were largely responsible for the chaos and destruction in the Middle East that had forced millions to flee their homelands.

“All of the wars fought by the west are in the name of the fight against terrorism, but without the Gulf War in 2003 there would be no ISIS. The weapons used by the extremists are supplied by the United States and its Arab allies, and it is no wonder that now the West is forced to pay the consequences of the policy of the US and its allies.”

Stefan was highly critical of the policies of the EU and the German government. “Chancellor [Angela] Merkel is trying to gain a positive political image with her expressions of sympathy for the refugees, but her stance is completely hypocritical. The reality for refugees is shown by their treatment here and in Europe as a whole. There is always the division made between the ‘good’ refugees and the ‘bad’ refugees. The EU has just said it will accept 250,000 refugees, but such a figure is entirely inadequate. There are single cities in Turkey which have accepted the same number. As for the refugee deaths in the Mediterranean, the EU and its member states have been aware of the situation for over a decade.”

Also waiting amongst the hundreds was a group of three brothers from Pakistan who had fled the fighting there and the threat from American drones and bombs. They had left behind their friends and family and began walking to Germany via Iran, Turkey, Hungary and Serbia. One of the brothers, Hassan, had a small slip of paper with his number. It read 16. The brothers explained they had already been waiting 9 days to enter the building and register.



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