Hamburg: Social Democrats and Greens promote brutal policy towards refugees

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The Senate (state executive) of the City of Hamburg justifies its inhumane treatment of refugees by claiming that it is being forced to undertake emergency measures due to the massive surge and cannot do more than the "essential". At the same time, however, the available accommodation and the support of specialized aid organizations are not being utilized.

On closer inspection, the organized chaos and catastrophic situation facing refugees can only be regarded as a deliberate policy by the coalition of Social Democrats and Greens that controls the Hamburg Senate, intended to deter refugees, place them in a bad light, undermine the solidarity shown by the general population and present an image of being overwhelmed.

The available resources of the city are being kept free for other projects. The mayor, Olaf Scholz (Social Democratic Party, SPD), described the desolate situation in a government statement on October 14 saying: "We are well prepared here."

But in the next breath he pointed to Hamburg's hopes for a major international project devouring billions: "Because this is so, we are looking at even more large-scale projects for the city. These include the bid to host the Olympics and Paralympic Summer Games 2024."

Although there are more than sufficient resources available, accommodation is insufficiently prepared, or not prepared at all, so that hundreds of refugees, including children, have to sleep on the street: lying on cardboard, newspaper or old rugs.

When 1,000 refugees were moved from the city's central exhibition halls to a vacant DIY store, it was not able to accommodate them all, even though it was known that the exhibition halls were not needed for a long time. Björn Domroese, spokesman for Interior Minister Michael Neumann (SPD), commented tersely, "Capacity is unfortunately exhausted."

Despite the refugees' precarious accommodation situation, the Senate has ignored thousands of offers by private individuals to house them. What became of these offers and why they were rejected, the authorities could not say. "The exact number of offers of refugee accommodation between 2012-2015 is not statistically recorded and therefore cannot be provided," says the response of the Senate on October 2 to a request for information by the Free Democratic Party (FDP).

Similar concerns have been voiced by Henry Stüven, from the Hamburg Property Owners Association in an interview with the *Hamburger Abendblatt* on October 13. He said, "Unfortunately, the administration has not taken such initiatives by the property owners seriously and refused many offers with a standard letter. The properties were not even looked at in more detail. This ruins a welcoming culture."

Moreover, according to Stüven, the authorities are not using "aid organizations such as the Agency for Technical Relief or the Red Cross in order to accommodate the refugees … These organizations understand such emergency situations and can handle them well."

The Senate is creating the conditions for violent conflicts and struggles over the distribution of support among camp residents (e.g., because of lack of facilities, such as the means of drying clothes in the wet tent camps. It ignores the warning by Stüven that "accommodation in large-scale facilities inevitably leads to conflicts."

The rising number of refugees as a result of war has been known for several years. Nevertheless, the city administration has failed to make the necessary plans to provide decent accommodation for refugees and the homeless. The care of refugees has not been adapted to the colder weather expected in autumn.

Like the volunteers, the senior staff of "Support and Housing," (F&W), a municipal housing company, feel abandoned by the politicians. They expressed their displeasure in an open letter, in which they denounce the

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unacceptable situation in the accommodation.

The plight of the refugees, according to them, has been ignored for years. Now there was a danger that the provision of decent accommodation for those in need was being totally destroyed.

Only a part of the current emergency measures are justified by the rise in refugee numbers, they believe. “There is another reason for the failings of Hamburg. In Hamburg, a strategic master plan is lacking for public accommodation, from intake to integration into rental housing, modeled on the experience of the nineties.”

In addition, according to the F&W letter, there was no forward-looking planning. Rather, capacity was radically reduced by imposing cuts.

The authors of the letter conclude, “Emergency measures that culminate in all previous standards of public accommodation being thrown overboard disturb the social peace in lodgings and dramatically reduce the acceptance of these facilities and their users.” They warn, “If emergency facilities with large numbers of desperate refugees dominate the cityscape, then this threatens to change the mood in our city to the benefit of more xenophobia.”

They also point to the dangers threatened by conflicts over the distribution of support. “Social peace in our city also requires that the Hamburg population dependent on affordable housing is not forced to compete with refugees and the homeless; that such groups are not pitted against each other. That is why even the regular public housing building programme has to be increased dramatically.” What is necessary are 10,000 additional dwellings, according to the authors.

The city has announced the construction of just 5,600 simple apartments for 28,000 refugees by the end of 2017. Policy-makers are well aware of the threat of conflict due to ghettoisation; in addition to managers and educational institutions in “refugee neighbourhoods", the “provision of sufficient police officers” is being planned, according to the *Hamburger Abendblatt*.

The long inaction and inadequate measures provided can only mean that those exercising political responsibility want to leave the refugees to their fate. The solidarity shown by ordinary people has apparently taken them completely by surprise, and is seen as a thorn in their side. Despite repeated requests over months, volunteers are receiving no support from the city authorities and face limitations or obstacles.

Adequate affordable housing is a general problem in Hamburg. However, more than 1.2 million square meters of office space are available and thousands of dwellings stand empty. There is also enough money to be spent or earmarked for totally overpriced prestige projects: The Elbe Philharmonic Hall (€865 million) or the planned bid for the Olympics 2024 (with an estimated total cost of €11.2 billion). The public purse is also to pay for the losses of HSH Nordbank (€6.2 billion for Hamburg and Schleswig-Holstein).

Nevertheless, Mayor Olaf Scholz says refugees will face continued inhuman accommodation: “We will demand a lot of many; including refugees. They will have to be prepared to stay in mass accommodation for some time.”

Moreover, the mayor is trying to silence critics of his policy, warning, “Those who make sweeping complaints about the mass accommodation, do not do justice to the humanitarian task we face.”

Further on, he rants: “Roman law understands the very basic idea that no one has to provide more than he can manage … This correct idea is often misused nowadays.” Indeed, and it is by Scholz himself, because he omits what is possible and feasible. Also the assertions of the Senate, not to be “able to provide more,” are contradicted by the facts.

When it comes to the punishment of conflicts with refugees as a result of the self-created “essential” circumstances, then Scholz discovers what is possible and feasible: “Those who are violent, must reckon with the force of the law. We will not accept that.”

The director of a Hamburg refugee camp described how explosive the situation is already. “We are sitting on a powder keg here,” he said. “We suspect that this will soon go up. We can no longer be responsible for what is happening here.”

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