

Berlin security guards assault refugees

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Private security guards stationed at the Berlin State Office for Health and Social Affairs (LaGeSo) carried out a brutal attack on refugees October 22.

A video posted on YouTube shows that security guards employed by the SpySec security firm overpowered refugees, wrestled them to the ground and punched and kicked them. The video does not show what happened immediately before the attack, but makes clear the brutality of the security guards.

According to press reports, two refugees were so badly injured they had to be hospitalised. Both victims have filed complaints for assault. According to the chief of the SpySec security company, the security guards involved have been temporarily suspended.

SpySec is a subcontractor of Gegenbauer Facility Management GmbH, which has been commissioned by LaGeSo to enforce security on the premises. Since midsummer, hundreds of refugees have stood in long lines and under inhumane conditions, often for weeks at a time, in order to register for asylum and receive some sort of state support.

Social Senator Mario Czaja (CDU), who is directly responsible for conditions at LaGeSo, was employed by Gegenbauer from 2002 to 2011. His former employer is now working hand in hand with the Berlin Senate (the local executive authority) to impose measures aimed at deterring and intimidating refugees.

The attack last Thursday was not an isolated case. The situation for refugees continues to be completely insecure at the centre, and they face all sorts of bureaucratic hurdles. Attacks such as what took place last Thursday are the logical consequence.

A team of WSWs reporters experienced first hand on Monday the type of clashes that erupt frequently at LaGeSo.

At the tent set up for preregistration of new arrivals, a cluster of people had formed hoping to finally get their turn. Some of them had already come several days in a

row. There was a dispute when the head of the campground management and an employee of LaGeSo suddenly rushed screaming into the tent pushing aside those waiting. The reporters present were also yelled at and thrown out of the tent, although they able to provide an authorisation slip provided by LaGeSo.

“I have experienced such things many times,” said Badjan (name changed), who fled from Gambia to Germany. “But we cannot defend ourselves, otherwise there are consequences. And that leads to more problems for us.” He told us how refugees were subject to harassment by security staff.

A few days ago, he had travelled by bus to a camp in the evening, Badjan said. Previously, he had waited a whole day to be able to finally speak with someone at LaGeSo. He had refrained from going to the toilet during that time because he did not want to lose his place in the queue.

When the bus finally arrived at the camp, the refugees were told they could not get out. “I asked to be allowed to go to the toilet,” Badjan said, “but the security guard said I had to stay on the bus.” When he finally went to the bathroom, the guard told him, “I said you are not allowed out. Now you have to stay another hour out there.” It was cold, and the refugee had no jacket.

Some refugees report that ordinary security guards were quite sympathetic, but clearly overwhelmed by their workload. The especially aggressive behaviour of the security guards at LaGeSo indicates that there is a method behind their actions. The inhumane treatment of refugees at the centre can ultimately be maintained only by force.

The trials and tribulations of refugees in Berlin begin at the LaGeSo tent. If they have been able to obtain a slip with a number, they have to wait for a bus that takes them to a shelter. This accommodation is short-term, designed only for a few days. Then the inhabitants are due to be brought to the central registry

in the Bundesallee, where they should receive pocket money, a medical card and longer-term accommodation. Many refugees report, however, that they have to remain in the emergency shelters for up to two weeks.

A group of Syrian refugees in front of LaGeSo were glad to meet journalists to report on the unspeakable conditions in their accommodation. “We will go back to Syria if this continues,” said a woman. They had been brought to the temporary accommodation two weeks ago and told they would have to stay just a few days, and would then be registered quickly.

The camp is run by the German Red Cross (DRK), but there was no one who could provide information about the accommodation process. So the group set off themselves to LaGeSo to get some answers. At LaGeSo, however, they only met security guards who told the group they have to queue for a number.

The group asked us to accompany them to their accommodation in Berlin-Steglitz, to observe the conditions for ourselves. There are 173 people housed in two gyms, women and men separately, plus families. There are no partitions between the beds and no privacy. The few sanitation facilities are inadequate for the large number and are repeatedly flooded.

According to the managing director of the DRK Berlin West, Holger Höringkle, the emergency shelter did “not meet the standards we would wish for,” but at least people had an alternative to homelessness. The Senate had instructed the army to erect beds and then requested a local DRK unit to look after the first 150 refugees who had already arrived. The DRK is trying to carry out its work with the help of volunteers and its own facilities. Full-time staff are responsible for planning.

The distribution of refugees to these camps has done little to ease the situation at LaGeSo. Those who received a number prior to October 15 are expected to be processed by mid-November. Registered refugees must then report monthly to the provincial authority in order to receive €140 in pocket money or coupons.

We spoke with Mudassar, who had fled from Pakistan. He had been waiting for five days at LaGeSo to get a health insurance voucher. Even if you have an appointment you have to wait for days, he said. In the afternoon those waiting are told they should come back the next day. “Some come therefore at three in the

morning to wait in the queue,” he said. On Monday morning, the queue referred to by Mudassar consisted of several hundred people.

Yasan came to Germany from Syria three months ago. He currently supports the initiative “Moabit helps,” which takes care of refugees at LaGeSo. “People have to wait here for so long, tensions are very high,” he said. “I have rights here as a human being even if I am not German. Attacks are not acceptable.” He also drew attention to the inhumane accommodation: “One problem is the endless waiting; the bigger problem is the accommodation in the camps.”



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