

European governments adopt Nazi-style measures against refugees

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Governments and authorities in Europe are stepping up their persecution of refugees with breath-taking speed. They are no longer refraining from adopting measures that recall the policies of Germany's National Socialists.

Last week, the Danish right-wing Liberal Party, which forms the government, presented a bill to parliament that permits border guards to confiscate money and valuables from refugees entering the country. To this end, the personal belongings of refugees will be searched and money or valuables worth more than 10,000 kroner (€1,340, \$1,460) will be taken.

The accommodation and care of refugees is allegedly to be financed by this measure. When refugee support organisations in Denmark and internationally protested, Minister of Integration Inger Støjberg said that items with particular emotional value, such as wedding rings and engagement rings, would be exempt. This was originally only to have been the case if they possessed no value.

Danish Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen made clear that this measure was aimed at deterring refugees from travelling to Denmark. The bill has been agreed with the largest opposition party, the Social Democratic Party.

The authorities in Switzerland were surprised by the protests over measures in that country, because there "this practice has existed for more than 20 years, it was adopted via a referendum," said spokeswoman for the Swiss state secretariat for immigration, Léa Gertheimer.

Refugees who enter Switzerland with valuables worth more than 1,000 francs (€915, around \$1,000) must relinquish everything above this limit. A Syrian refugee told Swiss television on Thursday how he was forced to

yield up around half of the €2,000 he brought to Switzerland with his family. He received a receipt.

The state secretariat for immigration in Bern reported that in 2015, 210,000 francs (€192,000) was confiscated from 112 people. Personal valuables like jewellery or earrings are excluded from such regulations. The refugees can retrieve their money if they leave the country within seven months.

The measures against refugees are becoming increasingly harsh and have horrific consequences. In Bornheim, Germany, near Bonn, social affairs councilman Markus Schnapka from the Greens imposed a ban on male refugees over 18 being housed in the city. Schnapka referenced "reports mounted of chauvinist behaviour" by male refugees.

The Green social affairs councilman later concretised his claim. According to Schnapka, six incidents of verbal sexual harassment were involved. No official charges have been made.

"It is clear to me that I am unjustly treating most people," Schnapka openly admitted. But "the ban is a signal." "Our understanding of the value of gender equality is not up for discussion." After protests and outrage from around the world, he announced the lifting of the housing ban within the week.

In the town of Rheinberg near Duisburg, the carnival procession on February 8 in the district of Orsoy was cancelled. The reason: an increased risk due to the presence of refugees. In the city district with a population of 3,000 people, 200 refugees are currently being accommodated in a former hospital.

A further 300 people are due to arrive at the central accommodation facility in North Rhine-Westphalia. A spokesperson for the town of Rheinberg referred to the New Year's Eve events in Cologne and said it could not be excluded that refugees would attend the carnival

procession and that similar scenes as in Cologne could take place due to the consumption of too much alcohol. This situation—the presence of refugees—carried a “potential risk,” said the town’s spokesman. Refugees were not familiar with carnival processions and, in addition, many “North Africans [live] in Orsoy”, and North Africans made up the overwhelming majority of suspects in Cologne, he said.

The confiscation of money and valuables, the barring of access to public institutions, the cancelling of celebrations due to the presence of refugees who are all placed under universal suspicion—all of this would have seemed inconceivable a short time ago because it recalls the brutal persecution of the Jewish population by the Nazis 80 years ago.

Immediately after they took power with Hitler’s appointment as chancellor on January 30, 1933, the Nazis began to terrorise the Jewish population. First, they were barred from accessing public institutions and their businesses were boycotted. Step by step, they were forced to sell their businesses, houses and all of their personal belongings at well below the market price. Later, all of their personal belongings, including money and jewellery, was confiscated. When they arrived at the concentration camps, the rest was taken. Even the gold teeth were torn out of the 6 million bodies.

In Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest concentration camp, around 1 million Jews were murdered out of a total of 1.1 million people. Most were gassed and subsequently burnt. Only through the liberation of the survivors in Auschwitz on January, 27, 1945 was this horrific chapter brought to an end.

Since 2005, politicians worldwide have recalled their responsibility for these crimes on January 27. When almost a year ago, the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz was commemorated, the European Commission “pledged ... to keep the memory of the Shoah alive and defend the values upon which a modern Europe is based—human rights, freedom and justice.”

Shortly after the attacks on Charlie Hebdo and the Kosher supermarket in Paris, Federica Mogherini, vice president of the EU Commission and EU foreign policy spokeswoman, declared, “Today, more than ever, it is insufficient to say ‘never again’.” More than ever, deeds had to follow from these words. “The younger

generations must know the horrors perpetrated on European soil and to stand up against anti-Semitism and discrimination of all kinds.”

Almost simultaneously, German Chancellor Angela Merkel (Christian Democrats) commemorated the Holocaust in Berlin. “The breakdown of civilisation in the Shoah” was a fundamental break with the essence of what “makes us human—the dignity of humanity,” she said.

One year later, the German government, under her leadership, along with the entire political establishment in Europe, is abusing the dignity of refugees. They are being excluded, bullied, expropriated and detained. Thousands are paying with their lives for trying to flee terrorism, poverty and war.

Seventy years after the Second World War and the crimes of the Nazis, capitalism once again threatens humanity with racism and war. It is organically incapable of resolving its economic crisis. The struggle against racism and war is inseparable from the fight against capitalism. This is the most important lesson to be drawn from the experiences of the 20th century.



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