

German government steps up attacks on refugees

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Members of the German government and leaders of the major political parties are currently seeking to outdo each other in proposing and adopting stricter measures to deter and repress refugees.

Last Friday, leaders of the grand coalition parties adopted the so-called Asylum Package II and thereby introduced a drastic curtailing of the right to asylum.

At a state party congress of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania on Saturday, Chancellor Angela Merkel declared that refugees from countries affected by civil war would have to return home after the end of those conflicts. This would affect the overwhelming majority of the close to 1 million refugees who sought protection in Germany last year. They are thus only being temporarily tolerated—with all the implications that has for their accommodation, legal rights and employment and education opportunities. After a short time—Merkel suggested three years—they would have to leave the country.

At the same time, Hannelore Kraft (Social Democratic Party, SPD), the minister-president of the most populous German state, North Rhine-Westphalia, demanded the reintroduction of district residency requirements for asylum applications. As a result, even if they lived in Germany for years, refugees could neither leave the district to which they had been assigned nor freely seek employment.

The Chief of Staff of the Federal Chancellery and Federal Minister for Special Affairs, Peter Altmaier (CDU), a highly influential figure, made clear that the German government was seeking to deport immigrants convicted of criminal offences and asylum seekers to so-called third countries like Turkey and Greece if deportation to their country of origin is not possible. “We are negotiating with Turkey and other countries

about accepting such refugees”, Altmaier told *Bild am Sonntag*.

The government evidently accepts that refugees convicted of offences in Germany will be held in prisons in Greece or Turkey, where they are threatened with serious mistreatment.

The list of countries deemed “safe countries of origin” is being expanded on a daily basis. Alongside Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria, Turkey and Afghanistan are now being defined as “safe”, allowing the government to reject asylum seekers from those nations and immediately deport those affected. In all these countries, turbulent conditions prevail and authoritarian regimes hold onto power through trampling on human rights and police-state measures.

On Tuesday, German interior minister Thomas de Maizière was in Kabul negotiating with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and his responsible minister for the repatriation of refugees from Germany. The interior minister’s trip took place under the tightest security. De Maizière himself was equipped with a bulletproof vest and helmet upon his arrival at Kabul airport and looked like a storm trooper in *Star Wars*. During the negotiations, a suicide bomber blew himself up just kilometres away, killing 20 and injuring dozens more.

However, none of this deterred de Maizière from declaring Afghanistan a “generally safe” country on his return, and brutally insisting that Afghan refugees should be kicked out of Germany. The interior minister said that, after all, attacks took place elsewhere in the world, and policy could not be based on such difficulties. In addition, there were “enough domestic flight alternatives” within Afghanistan.

This is contradicted, however, not just by the seven bomb attacks registered in Kabul already this year, which also impacted the German army. Afghanistan’s

minister for refugees has described 31 of the country's 34 provinces as unsafe. The capital Kabul was among the three safe provinces.

In 2015, 31,382 Afghans submitted asylum applications in Germany. Around 80 percent received a positive response—a figure that rose to 86 percent in the third quarter. This means that even the decision-makers at the federal office for migration and refugees, who are by no means timid about turning down applications, assume that people are at risk in Afghanistan. Ignoring this, the government is intensifying its practice of deportation.

Christian Social Union (CSU) leader Horst Seehofer named a wide range of states that should be classified as “safe”, including Armenia, Bangladesh, Benin, Gambia, Georgia, India, Mali, Moldova, Mongolia, Nicaragua and Ukraine.

The SPD has taken over the role of chief demagogue within the government. SPD minister of labour and social affairs, Andrea Nahles, a former “left”, has denounced “foreigners” unwilling to integrate into German society who are supposedly living better than native Germans claiming Hartz IV social welfare. She announced major cuts to welfare for refugees. The strict regulations for Hartz IV claimants would be imposed on asylum seekers and asylum seekers' welfare, she said.

Nahles wrote in a guest column in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, “Those who come here, seek protection and want to start a new life must stick to our rules and values.” She went on, “Whoever claims assistance, must use all of his ability and labour power—and, like everyone else by the way—his own wealth. Whoever does not do that will not receive ongoing support here.” There was “no right to support without effort”.

As with British Prime Minister David Cameron, Nahles targeted immigrants from other European Union (EU) countries. “All EU citizens have the absolute right to live where they want within the EU,” she wrote. “But they must stand on their own two feet—as the vast majority of EU citizens do here—and not be dependent from the outset on social welfare. The municipalities cannot provide unlimited support to EU foreigners without means.”

Nahles' conclusion was to join the CSU in its demand for the slashing of social welfare for those

allegedly refusing to integrate. “Those who indicated their unwillingness to integrate will have their welfare cut. In my opinion, this should also be connected to the completion of language courses and sticking to the basic rules of our society.”

In fact, language and integration courses are not available for the vast majority of refugees, or the latter have to wait months before finding a place. Nahles' foul contribution exposes the racist character of the current refugee debate.

The extent to which the SPD is promoting racist positions was recently shown in Essen, in the Ruhr region. There, the district party organisation allowed placards to be printed for a demonstration that proclaimed, in the style of the neo-Nazi National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD), “Enough is enough! Integration has limits”.

Such slogans and demands are encouraging right-wing extremist forces. Violent acts against refugees are spreading. Last year alone, the police recorded over 1,000 attacks on refugees and their accommodations. Last Friday, unknown assailants threw a hand grenade at a refugee centre in Villingen-Schwenningen, which luckily did not explode.

These right-wing forces then serve as a pretext for strengthening the police, intelligence agencies and the army. At the beginning of the week, the Seeheimer Circle, an alliance of the SPD right wing, which includes party chairman Sigmar Gabriel, foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier and parliamentary leader Thomas Oppermann, called for thousands of additional personnel and hundreds of millions of euros to strengthen domestic security. In addition, the German army should also be able to deploy domestically, the group said.

As in the 1930s, the ruling elite is promoting chauvinism and anti-immigrant sentiments to channel social discontent in a right-wing direction, strengthen the state and create a movement that can be turned against the entire working class.



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